

Canterbury

District Health Board

Te Poari Hauora o Waitaha

Alcohol Position Statement

A Response to the Law Commission's Review of Liquor Laws in New Zealand by Canterbury District Health Board

Canterbury District Health Board calls on Parliament to use the current historic opportunity brought about by the Law Commission's 'first principles' review of the liquor laws to change the damaging heavy drinking culture in New Zealand.

Alcohol is responsible for the deaths of more than 1000 New Zealanders each year. About half (49%) of these deaths are due to chronic alcohol-related diseases, especially various cancers (24%). Consumption of alcohol is in fact related to more than 60 medical conditions. A recent report¹ concludes that the evidence for alcohol as a cause of cancers of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus, colorectum (men) and breast is "convincing" and that it is a probable cause of cancer of the liver and colorectum in women. More recently, a definite link with prostate cancer in men has been established².

The other 51% of NZ deaths caused annually by alcohol are due to injuries. These injuries are disproportionately amongst young people, which impacts significantly on years of life lost due to alcohol. This is calculated to be 17,000 per year³.

In calling for this change we are joining the 450 leading Doctors and Nurses of New Zealand who have previously made a public stand, highlighting the damage from heavy drinking, and promoting a solution based on international research.

This solution is a set of mutually reinforcing policies referred to as the 5+ Solution:

1. Raise alcohol prices
 2. Raise the purchase age
 3. Reduce alcohol accessibility
 4. Reduce marketing and advertising
 5. Increase drink-driving countermeasures
- PLUS: Increase treatment opportunities for heavy drinkers

We note that the final report of the Law Commission's review of the liquor laws "Alcohol in our lives: Curbing the harm" fully endorses this set of policy directives.

We encourage the Government to enact with urgency a comprehensive set of liquor laws based on these principles, to bring about major change in New Zealand's heavy drinking culture and reduce the enormous impact that alcohol is having, not only on heavy drinkers, but their families and wider communities including the whole of Aotearoa New Zealand.

1 World Cancer Research Fund/American Institute for Cancer Research. Food, nutrition, physical activity, and the prevention of cancer: a global perspective. AICR, Washington DC, 2007.

2 Fillmore KM, Chikritzhs T, Stockwell T, Bostrom A, Pascal R. Alcohol use and prostate cancer: A meta-analysis. *Molecular Nutrition & Food Research* 2009;53:240-255.

3 Connor J, Broad J, Rehm J, Vander Hoorn S, Jackson R. The burden of death, disease and disability due to alcohol in New Zealand. *New Zealand Medical Journal* 15 April – 2005;118(1213): <http://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/118-1213/1412/>