

Public Health Association Media release
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Government response on alcohol missing the changes that work best

The Public Health Association says the government's proposed changes to alcohol laws are a step in the right direction, but will not impact significantly enough on New Zealand's harmful drinking.

National Executive Officer Dr Gay Keating says we have developed a booze-soaked culture that will change little without all of the substantive and comprehensive changes recommended by the Law Commission.

"Two of the most important areas where changes were recommended have been by-passed: the proliferation of cheap alcohol and manic advertising and promotion. These two areas are at the heart of our liberalised drinking environment which has led to serious harm for individuals, families and communities."

A 2009 report to the Ministry of Health estimated the cost of alcohol harm in New Zealand at \$5.3 billion per year or \$14.5 million every day.

Dr Keating says every year a thousand New Zealanders die from alcohol-related causes, and thousands more use up valuable health resources and hospital beds through alcohol related accidents and disease.

"It is therefore most unfortunate that the government has chosen not to implement the approaches that evidence shows are most effective to reduce alcohol harm.

"Research is clear that advertising leads to earlier onset of drinking and to heavier drinking. Removing alcohol advertising, including sponsorship for sporting events, would go a long way towards bringing down consumption, much as it did for tobacco.

"It's also clear that both young drinkers and heavy drinkers favour cheap alcohol, so increasing the cost of alcohol through either excise or minimum pricing, would reduce harm in these high-risk groups while reducing the financial burden alcohol places on the tax payer."

Dr Keating says the government has misread the public mood on alcohol law reform, but that there will still be opportunity to strengthen proposed changes during the Select Committee process.

"This is a once-in-a-generation chance to reform alcohol laws in a way that will benefit the health and wellbeing of all New Zealanders. It would be extremely regrettable not to make the most of that opportunity while we can."

For more information contact:

Dr Gay Keating, National Executive Officer, PHA
04 474 3060 | 0273 414 708