



Media Release

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Parliament has grossly let down the 78% of New Zealanders who have expressed their wish for the minimum purchase to be raised in order to reduce the harm experienced by our young people.

In response to Parliament's decision this evening to retain the current purchase age at 18 years, Alcohol Healthwatch Director Rebecca Williams says it is of deep concern to know that the majority of our Members of Parliament have ignored scientific evidence and strong public support for returning the purchase age to 20 years. She says it does not bode well for the rest of the decision making on the Alcohol Reform Bill.

Returning the purchase age to 20 years would have prevented deaths, injuries and ill-health of children and other young New Zealanders, and contributed to changing our harmful drinking culture that is dominated by heavy drinking.

Young people experience disproportionate harm from their alcohol use, and this is due to the realities of being young. Their brains are still developing, their bodies are changing and they are less able to process alcohol which means they get intoxicated quicker than those older. In addition, early drinking increases the risk of experiencing both immediate and long term harms from alcohol.

Williams says we must aim to delay the onset of drinking by young people and reduce their access to alcohol, and raising the purchase age is an effective way of doing this. Other measures such as increasing the price of alcohol, restricting alcohol marketing and reducing the number of outlets and the hours they operate are also cost effective measures.

MPs will need to lift their game if they are to achieve the desired change in drinking culture through this law reform process. Community eyes will be on them when the remainder of the Alcohol Reform Bill comes before them.

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