

Call to Action on Alcohol hits the mark

Alcohol Healthwatch media release, 9 June 2014

Last week's **Call for Action** by Alcohol Action New Zealand is a reminder that there is still more to be done to address our problem drinking culture.

Alcohol Healthwatch Director Rebecca Williams says that while we now have some measures in place to reduce the availability of alcohol, other effective measures have so far been rejected or deferred by Government. She says that while we still have 25.6 percent of drinkers drinking harmfully at least once a month, a more comprehensive response is required by the powers that be.

"The Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012 has certainly turned us around from the liberal approach of yesteryear, and makes some tentative steps towards reducing alcohol-related harm. However, big risk factors like alcohol marketing and affordability have not been addressed," Ms Williams says.

"Young New Zealanders under the legal purchase age are exposed to more alcohol marketing than adults because the alcohol industry is using them to promote their products and drinking via social media – turning them into 'prosumers'."

She says exposure to alcohol marketing is proven to promote earlier uptake of drinking by young people and heavier drinking by those who already drink. Cheap alcohol enables heavier drinking by keeping it more affordable.

"This is why, back in 2010, the New Zealand Law Commission recommended alcohol marketing be phased out and that alcohol excise taxed be increased by 50 percent."

Alcohol Action New Zealand's **Call for Action** last week called for the phasing out of alcohol advertising and sponsorship, introduction a minimum unit price for alcohol and increases to alcohol tax.

"These approaches are strongly supported by the research base, and will address the problems associated with alcohol while not unduly affecting responsible drinkers. Public opinion surveys consistently report that New Zealanders are supportive of them because they will reduce harmful drinking." Ms Williams says.

"The call to action on alcohol is supported by a growing list of health professionals, academics and community leaders, and is a strong reminder to the next Government of New Zealand that they will be expected to act on the evidence and on the wishes of the wider community."

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