

Piece meal approach to alcohol policy to blame for an increase in hazardous drinking rates

Alcohol Healthwatch media release, 10th December 2015

Alcohol Healthwatch Director Rebecca Williams says the piece-meal approach to alcohol policy in New Zealand is to blame for an increase in hazardous drinking rates.

She's referring to the Annual Update of Key Results from the New Zealand Health Survey 2014/15 released today by the Ministry of Health which shows hazardous drinking rates have returned to the 2006/07 level of 18 percent.

Hazardous drinking rates of 45-54-year-olds drinkers are up from 12 percent in 2006/7 to 18 percent in the latest survey. Fifty-two percent of Pacific males who drank in the last year are hazardous drinkers. This highlights continuing and unacceptable levels of harm and inequities, she says.

While hazardous drinking rates among youth (aged 18-24 years) have improved since 2006/07, they've worsened slightly since 2011/12, and are now at 34 percent.

"New Zealand had the opportunity in 2010 to implement a strong suite of policies recommended by the Law Commission. Instead the Government did exactly what the Commission advised against and cherry picked from these.

"The only meaningful changes implemented have been the national default trading hours established by the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012, and the reduced blood alcohol limit for drivers that came into effect last year. Other than that the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act has largely failed to deliver, and has been costly and problematic to implement often pitting local communities against well-resourced industry players in extended legal battles.

"Meanwhile the Government has sat on a report and recommendations by the Ministerial Forum on Alcohol Advertising and Sponsorship, which echoes much of what the Law Commission recommended in 2010, for over a year. And it's refused to consider tax increases and minimum unit pricing policies despite these being the most cost effective options to address harmful drinking."

The World Health Organisation's Global Framework for Monitoring Non-Communicable Diseases sets a target for member states to reduce hazardous drinking by 10% by 2025, but Williams says we're heading in the wrong direction.

"In the end we will be made to look like fools given that we know what needs to be done to reduce alcohol-related harm and we simply haven't done it."

Ends.

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The Annual Update of Key Results from the New Zealand Health Survey 2014/15 is available at <http://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/annual-update-key-results-2014-15-nzhs-dec15-1.pdf>