

20 July 2017

Media Release: Communities win and lose against the alcohol industry

Community and public health groups working to reduce alcohol-related harm are thrilled that community calls to halt the proliferation of alcohol outlets in Auckland have been heard.

Māori Public Health provider Hāpai Te Hauora and Alcohol Healthwatch strongly support the decision released yesterday which will see Auckland Council adopt a policy which places a two-year freeze on new off-licences in areas of Auckland that experience high levels of alcohol-related harm. The alcohol industry vigorously fought this policy but their appeals were dismissed by the Alcohol Regulatory and Licensing Authority. The decision also supports the policy's closing time of alcohol sales from bottle stores, supermarkets and grocery stores being 9pm.

Anthony Hawke of Hāpai Te Hauora said, "Communities have strongly voiced their wishes for tighter restrictions on the availability of alcohol. Nobody in our communities is saying, 'Gosh – we wish there were more places to buy booze'. These new laws were intended to increase community say on alcohol matters, so we're delighted that communities have been heard."

Executive Director of Alcohol Healthwatch, Dr Nicki Jackson, agrees.

"Around 75 percent of all alcohol sold in Auckland is from off-licences. There is overwhelming evidence that the number of off-licences in communities increases alcohol-related harm. These negative effects are known to be significantly greater on our Māori and Pacific communities.

"When compared to the rest of the country, Auckland experiences more alcohol-related hospital admissions and more night-time assaults. Earlier closing hours and halting the proliferation of outlets can lessen the impact of alcohol on our Emergency Departments, and free up valuable Police resources, given that one-fifth of these are currently used in addressing alcohol-related harm."

However, Dr Jackson warns there is a catch. Auckland Council's policy is not a law – it is but one of many criteria used to make decisions on new alcohol licences. As such, the policy does not automatically prevent a new off-licence outlet from opening in high-risk areas.

"But of course we hope the Licensing Committee places significant weight on the policy given its strong evidence base and community input."

Although the decision sends a strong message about the harm caused by the availability of alcohol from bottle stores, supermarkets and grocery stores, Hāpai Te Hauora and Alcohol Healthwatch were disappointed that the decision did not curb back the trading hours for bars and nightclubs. Auckland's proposed hours will remain, allowing bars and nightclubs to apply for licences with a 4am closing in the CBD and 3am elsewhere in the region.

Dr Jackson was concerned with the finding.

“There is overwhelming evidence that alcohol-related harm increases exponentially after midnight,” she said.

“In countries where trading hours have been reduced, significant reductions in violence have been seen. Despite common belief, not all international cities are open so late at night. Our communities also expressed a strong desire to curb back the trading hours to reduce the harm they experience. We cannot wait another six years (until the policy is reviewed) to reduce the high levels of alcohol-related harm in the Auckland region. This is a cost to us all.”

ENDS

Contact:

Anthony Hawke, General Manager Hāpai Te Hauora Māori Public Health ph. 021 952 424

Dr. Nicki Jackson, Executive Director Alcohol Healthwatch ph. (09) 520 7035, 021 187 9749