

# News Views

The Newsletter of Alcohol Healthwatch

## Forum Provides Inspiration for Action on Alcohol Policy

Alcohol Healthwatch's 'Opportunities for Action' forum in April provided abundant inspiration and an excellent opportunity for networking. The 70 odd people who attended represented a wide range of sectors working in alcohol harm reduction – including police, district licensing, public health, research and community work.

Professor Robin Room, an internationally renowned researcher in alcohol policy from Stockholm University, was the keynote speaker. Room is co-author of "Alcohol: no ordinary commodity" a recent World Health Organisation sponsored review of evidence for the effectiveness of different policy approaches.

Room outlined various 'framings' or approaches to dealing with alcohol issues, and gave an overview of the evidence base for a range of strategies to reduce alcohol related harm.

He said that education and persuasion strategies are always popular, but studies show that it is hard to demonstrate substantial and lasting effects on behaviour. He went on to say that media and other persuasional campaigns may have more potential if they are aimed at others around the drinker or at building popular support for policy measures.

Strategies aimed at creating safer bars, such as server intervention training, can be effective if coupled with enforcement, but the effectiveness of some of these measures is yet to be established. Regulating the availability and conditions of use of alcohol through minimum purchase age, taxation and licensing of sellers, he said, are relatively cost effective strategies and have good evidence for effectiveness.

Room pointed to the lack of strong correlation between popular and effective strategies. "Effective strategies are often opposed because they threaten economic interests, and because of conflict with competing values and ideologies." He suggested that it is harder to get effective strategies implemented once easier and more acceptable strategies are in place.

Room also spoke about alcohol in a global context, painting a picture of consumption increasing with affluence and marketing by multi-nationals pushing sales.

"In a globalising world, local and even national controls no longer suffice. There is a need to recognise that alcohol is 'no ordinary commodity'. While other commodities, such as tobacco, are covered by international conventions, alcohol has nothing."

Room suggested that an international framework convention on alcohol control would be a lever for internal policy change as much as for control across borders.

Back in a local context, Professor Ross McCormick, Director of the Goodfellow Unit at Auckland University ran through the findings of his latest research: 'Changes in drinking behaviour detected in Auckland general patients between 1995 and 2003.' The study indicates "a general worsening in female binge, risky and problematic drinking across almost all ages" while male binge, risky and problematic drinking shows a more mixed pattern of change.



*Professor Robin Room addresses "Opportunities for Action" forum.*

Ross Henderson, from Waikato District Health Board, delivered an entertaining and challenging presentation from a public health practitioner perspective. Symptoms of the malaise in alcohol-related public health approaches, he said, include 'patch protection', reliance on old ideas, reluctance to consider research that negates the way we do things, and a trend towards taking a politically correct route of not upsetting other organisations - including working alongside the industry.

Henderson believes that a co-ordinated approach with other agencies is vital. "We need to form alliances and coalitions and we also need to be adversarial. Resourcing is needed for the more extreme position to shift the perceived middle ground. And a case needs to be made for advocacy so that it is legitimised."

Ross Henderson's address was an ideal scene-setter for a closer look at one NGO's efforts to shift some key policy areas around alcohol.

Alcohol Healthwatch gave an overview of its current "Action on Liquor" campaign and a summary of the rationale behind each of the five policy areas: changes to the alcohol excise tax system, reducing legal BAC for driving, amendments to the Sale of Liquor Act, increased restrictions on alcohol advertising, and health and safety advice for alcohol.

In the afternoon, forum participants discussed alcohol issues that were of concern to them and possible ways forward.

A strong theme that emerged from the forum was the need for those interested and involved in progressing healthy policy around alcohol to further strengthen relationships. Alcohol Healthwatch has taken an initial step towards this by inviting forum participants to be part of an email link (see back page).

In summing up the day Professor Room commented that,

while a lot of problems develop in the community and tools are needed to deal with these, we must also look towards effective alcohol policy formulation at a national level. Room, who found the day 'quite exciting', also emphasised the need for building

coalitions. 'From a small grain dropped in liquid, lo and behold a crystal forms.'

Full summaries of presentations can be found in PDF format on [www.ahw.co.nz](http://www.ahw.co.nz).

## **FASD Matters!**

Once again we have Canada to thank for bringing to the attention of New Zealand the latest in 'best practice' strategies for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), and for providing a catalyst for strategic action.

In April, Alcohol Healthwatch was pleased to coordinate a seminar on FASD Diagnosis and Early Intervention with a team of 3 specialists from the Asante Center in British Columbia, Canada. The Centre is a multidisciplinary unit named after its founder Dr Kwadwo Ohene Asante, a paediatrician who has worked in Canadian communities with affected children and families for more than 30 years. The Centre provides a comprehensive diagnostic programme with ongoing family support services, education and policy advice for the region, all of which have a prevention focus. The Asante visit to New Zealand was sponsored by the Alcohol Advisory Council of NZ and seminars were held in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington and Christchurch. The Centre's clinical psychologist was able to share experiences and coping strategies of affected children and their families from a neuro-behavioural perspective, while the coordinator shared the philosophical approach of the Centre, which is to be totally family centred. The Asante Centre website [www.asantecentre.org/](http://www.asantecentre.org/) provides a wealth of up-to-date information on the subject and is worth a visit.

In June we welcomed back to Auckland Associate Professor of Psychology Jo Nanson from the University of Saskatchewan. Dr Nanson spoke on the subject "FASD and Adolescence", a time when individuals with FASD are particularly vulnerable. Attendees came from as far a field as Northland, and included people working in youth mental health, youth justice, alcohol and drug services, adoption services, corrections, police, special education and family/whanau support. Jo shared her extensive knowledge and experience of working within the court system in Canada, where there is a growing awareness of the need to change the approach to affected youth in trouble with the law.

The Jo Nanson seminar was followed by a concert called "*Mind That Brain*", which was sponsored by ALAC and coordinated by Suia Simi of Lavea'i Trust with a small army of volunteers. Children and young people from the Auckland region used music, song and drama to convey the message that drinking alcohol during pregnancy can permanently damage an unborn baby, particularly brain development. The children of Aotearoa New Zealand are the best qualified to convey this important message to adults and to alert the next generation of this important responsibility of parenthood.

Alcohol Healthwatch hosts an email link for those interested in FASD matters (see back page).

## **European countries attack alcopops with taxes**

In moves to try to curb drinking by young people, several European countries are introducing heavy taxes on alcopops.

Last month German MPs approved a new levy of between US 80-90 cents a bottle of the ready-to-drink mixes, depending on size and alcohol content. Lawmakers expect the tax to cut back sales of alcopops by up to 75 percent. Extra tax revenues collected through the levy, which could amount to US \$50 million annually, will be earmarked for drug-abuse prevention education programmes. German alcopops will also be labelled "may not be given to persons under 18 years." According to figures from the government agency charged with preventing drug abuse, half of all the alcopop drinks sold in Germany are consumed by underage drinkers.

Last year the Swiss parliament quadrupled the tax on a bottle of alcopop. The price increases are to be combined with community-based strategies to reduce surging drinking among teenagers.

A similar tax move in France in 1997 caused the market for alcopops to almost disappear. Soon after the introduction of alcopops to Sweden, the government was forced to retract its decision not to sell alcopops in the state alcohol monopoly, as this was deemed to be breaching European Union free trade rules.

The sugary, fruity flavour that disguises the taste of alcohol in

these mixes, as well as marketing that appeals to young people, makes them highly popular 'starter drinks' among teenagers. This has been confirmed by research, for example a study from the Media Business Group in the UK found that alcoholic lemonade was the second most popular drink after Coca-Cola with children as young as 12.

Sales of these products appear to be big business for the manufacturers. Media reports have stated that sales of Smirnoff Ice, for example, make up over half the profits of drinks giant Diageo. Producers of alcopops and their supporting organisations defend the drinks, insisting that they do not appeal to the underage nor encourage alcohol abuse. They criticise the 'inappropriate' focusing on alcopops to the exclusion of other alcoholic drinks, and would prefer to see voluntary codes for their marketing. Drink manufacturers in Germany plan to launch a legal challenge to the new law.

Alcopops are marketed in New Zealand with names like 'Mi5', 'Tattoo - vodka and cranberry', and 'Vodka Cruiser' and some are available for as little as \$1 a bottle. In New Zealand the demand for spirits based drinks has risen dramatically since their introduction.

*Adapted from: The Week in Germany, 7.7.04; Swiss Info 2.2.04; and Reuters, 12.7.04 and The Globe 1:97*

# School fights back over bottle shop

“Our school community is left to feel disenfranchised and vulnerable rather than vibrant and safe.” So says another school community in Auckland, outraged at the appearance of a liquor outlet as their immediate neighbour.

Taking it upon themselves to protest against the process that has allowed this to happen, a group of concerned parents and the Board of Trustees have submitted to Auckland City Council’s Long Term Community Plan, on which communities are consulted as to their ‘desired outcomes’.

“No school *desires* to have a liquor outlet as an immediate neighbour. It contradicts the Council’s aims to create safer communities and neighbourhoods and promote law and order in the city,” says the submission from Edendale School and Sandringham community.

The outlet backs on to a reserve with a children’s playground and a grassed area used by the school, and is bordered by Plunket Rooms, a Scout Den and housing. Concerns include that the children’s safety may be compromised by broken glass in playground bark and grass, graffiti, litter and, in the worst case, drunk and disorderly behaviour. They are also concerned that the visible influence of alcohol advertising next to a school ‘normalises’ brand recognition at a vulnerable stage of the children’s development.

Assaults and vandalism have apparently already escalated since another off-licence opened 200m away in the Sandringham business district, also situated next to a public reserve.

The school is amazed at the lack of mechanisms for effective community consultation between the Council and the neighbourhood regarding alcohol issues, and strongly recommends that community consultation over the location of liquor outlets be improved. They say that while legislation now allows social impacts and locational effects to be taken into account for gambling and prostitution, current liquor licensing legislation does not.

Their submission, well supported by research evidence and an impressive collection of local and regional associations including Auckland Principal’s Association, outlines some key recommendations.

- That no licensed premises be located within 100m of a primary or secondary school or public reserve.
- That the sale of alcohol be made a publicly notified discretionary activity in business zones, ensuring immediate residents are automatically notified and impacts able to be considered by councils.
- That all council-controlled children’s playgrounds are covered by a continuous liquor control bylaw.
- That best practice community consultation and a mechanism for better communication on locational issues between Planning and the District Licensing Agency staff be developed.



*Liquor store located next to Edendale School*

They are requesting that the District Plan be changed as soon as possible to accommodate these recommendations.

The first the Edendale School community knew about the liquor outlet was when the shop’s advertising hoardings were being installed. There were 3 days left to make objections and only then to the criteria of licensee suitability and hours of operation.

Parent Andrew Bell comments that it’s easy to appease people wanting resource consents and licences with the existing process. In this case even the necessity to have a sign on the building for public notification purposes was waived due to renovations. The resource consent was originally for a medical centre and was deemed non-notifiable.

These concerns over process have a ring of similarity to the experience of other schools that *News and Views* has written about (see *Issue 35, 2002, Issue 36, 2003*).

The Edendale submitters also requested that their recommendations be included as policy in the Auckland City Council Alcohol Strategy which is soon to be released for consultation. They have been advised that the Strategy will contain a clause similar to their first recommendation - that licences will not be granted within 100 metres of a school.

## **US lawsuits target alcohol industry**

Attorneys across the US have begun to target the alcoholic beverage industry, filing lawsuits that claim 'extremely sophisticated marketing' is selling liquor to underage drinkers. The lawsuits are modelled on the cases brought against the tobacco industry in the mid 1980s, as a result of which tobacco companies agreed to pay \$240 billion to state governments to cover health care costs and other smoking-related expenses.

Leading brewers and distillers targeted include Bacardi & Co. Ltd., Coors Brewing Co., and Heineken. Accusations against them include: "the use of long-running, sophisticated and deceptive schemes to market alcoholic beverages to children and other underage consumers", that alcohol companies place ads in magazines that appeal to underage young people, and that companies encourage underage drinking by posting rules for drinking games on company web sites.

Among the defence attorneys' legal arguments for dismissing the cases are: the protection of commercial speech, that the lawsuits are a tactic in a social campaign rather than a valid claim for legal relief, and that the Federal Trade Commission has found "no evidence of intent by advertisers to target minors."

Estimates (from Columbia State University) indicate that underage drinkers in America consumed \$22.5 billion worth of alcohol in 1999, or 20 percent of the US market.

*Adapted from US Today (13.5.04)*



### **"It starts here for designated drivers"**

Free non-alcoholic drinks all night will encourage designated drivers in a campaign launched on Auckland's North Shore and Rodney District recently. Entitled "Start Here", the campaign aims to encourage young adults to plan ahead and appoint a designated driver when planning a night out. A group of Massey University Students had input into the campaign logo and key messages, such as the slogan "Think Before You Drink".

Those licensees who choose to sign up for the campaign are provided with free t-shirts for their bar staff and posters and coasters promoting driver responsibility.

The campaign was launched with a seminar for licensees which provided lots of valuable information about responsible beverage service, including identifying minors and intoxicated patrons, as well as tips from experts about making a profit from food, and 'becoming the best in host responsibility'.

The project has a truly collaborative team, including North Shore and Rodney District Licensing Agencies, ACC, Police, North Shore and Rodney Road Safety, Regional Public Health and Alcohol Healthwatch. They report that feedback so far has been "really positive".

## **Environment Court considers social effects**

*Decision No. 37/2004*

It is very rare that the Resource Management Act has been used to successfully oppose the location of a licensed premise. In March, however, the Environment Court dismissed an appeal against Dunedin City Council, who had refused to grant resource consent to establish an off-licence in a Residential 3 zone. Reasons given by the Council for refusing the sale of liquor from the site included: the effect of noise and traffic on the amenity values of the neighbourhood and potential social and health effects arising from a retail outlet.

During the hearing, a submission was heard from a representative of the Muslim Association on the potential cultural effects and tensions arising from the sale of alcohol on the site only two properties away from a mosque.

The Court concluded that allowing the liquor outlet would "result in a cumulative but discernable change in the character of the zone from Residential toward Commercial", and "introduce small but measurable impacts on the amenity and safety of the residents".

## **Alcohol Healthwatch email networks**

Alcohol Healthwatch facilitates two online email bulletins providing people with updates on regional, national and international news.

1. Alcohol Policy Network – An email network that developed out of the "Opportunities for Action" Forum in April this year.
2. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Update – An email link for people with a special interest in FASD prevention, service development and research.

If you have an interest in alcohol policy development for Aotearoa New Zealand and/or an interest in FASD matters and would like to receive updates, please email Christine Rogan for more details.

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**Disclaimer:** The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of Alcohol Healthwatch Trust.

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