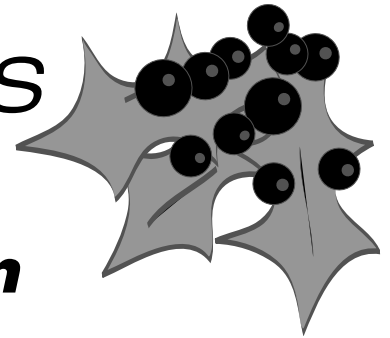


News Views

2005

the year in reflection



In this Christmas edition of New and Views, Alcohol Healthwatch reflects on alcohol issues this year nationally, regionally and globally, with comments from some key people and agencies.

2005 – the nation and alcohol

2005 has been a year of high profile for alcohol issues in New Zealand. Alongside continued reporting of mounting alcohol-related problems, the year has seen the greatest progress towards examining some of the bigger policy issues concerning alcohol in a number of years.

A major instigator of much lively debate and discussion has been, of course, the plucking of Matt Robson's Sale of Liquor (Youth Alcohol Harm Reduction) Amendment Bill from the ballot box in May. Venturing into the controversial topics of "drinking age", supply to minors by adults other than parents and oversight of broadcast alcohol advertising, the bill has sparked media debates and commentaries on issues fundamental to the sale and marketing of alcohol in New Zealand.

Matt Robson (see box) says that he never saw the bill as the "final solution", but "the beginning of an intelligent and informed debate". It has been welcomed by a number of agencies

as a chance to revisit poor policy decisions of the past as well as to air wider grievances about the Sale of Liquor Act and other legislation concerning alcohol.

Chairman of The New Zealand Medical Association, Ross Boswell, for one, promised strong submissions from the Association to the select committee. "The bill is a golden opportunity for MPs to revisit their earlier decision to lower the purchase age to 18, and importantly, they will have the chance to consider advertising, liquor sale controls and other factors related to the abuse of alcohol by young New Zealanders. This is a real chance to get it right!"

The bill has also been the likely prompt for the Ministry of Justice to undertake its own targeted consultation on amendments which would enhance the operation and enforcement of the Act.

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Hon Matt Robson

"I was one of the MPs who for a long time thought that just decent education on the use of alcohol would eventually solve abuse of alcohol, particularly with the young.

There was evidence that young people were using alcohol in more and more dangerous ways, but I comforted myself

with the fact that many more than in my teenage years seemed to use a driver who was sober for the "binge" nights out. I also believed that we would, with liberal access to alcohol, evolve into a nation of "sophisticated" drinkers — whatever that might mean!

But confronted with the international evidence that, to drastically lower harm from alcohol, barriers needed to be in

place in terms of access to and marketing of alcohol, I had to do a drastic rethink. Thus my private member's bill to return the purchase age to 18, tighten restrictions on under-age alcohol supply and further restrict television marketing.

I never saw the bill as the "final solution" but the beginning of an intelligent and informed debate by Parliamentarians and the public, building on the excellent research of our own public health organizations.

Although disappointed that I am not in Parliament to pursue the issue, I know that the new sponsor, Martin Gallagher, will do an excellent job as the Select Committee chair and that he is dedicated to ensuring that the issue is not swept under the cluttered parliamentary carpet. The Hon Jim Anderton, Leader of the Progressive Party and Associate Minister of Health, is also committed on behalf of our Party to pursuing the issue.

I now look forward to working as a member of the public to ensuring that our new Parliament lives up to its duty to legislate in the interests of the health of all of our people."

Another major policy event of the year has been the promise of a government-led review of the regulation of marketing of alcoholic beverages – the first in at least a decade. The not-for-profit organisation Group Against Liquor Advertising, whose petition to Parliament prompted the decision for a review, have been awaiting progress on this, but say it is presently mired with government processes. Chairperson Viola Palmer says that while in general there are fewer alcohol advertisements on TV, more money is going into other types of marketing – such as prizes, happy hours etc, and sponsorship, which is “creeping in all over the place”. “Quite a number of liquor advertisements are breaking the advertisers’ own codes, especially those relating to the use of heroes of the young.” Some agencies have voiced concern that the review will be bold enough to really make a difference to the real issues surrounding marketing, such as the trend towards newer modes of marketing in youth environments.

Research in the alcohol field in 2005 has provided quantification of the burden of disability due to alcohol use disorders⁽¹⁾ as well as more information about the drinking patterns of Maori and Pacific drinkers compared to the national population. We are awaiting the availability of studies measuring the impact of lowering the purchase age on traffic accidents and disorder, and also an update on levels of alcohol use and alcohol-related harm among young people in New Zealand.

A mixed year Rebecca Williams

Director of Alcohol Healthwatch Rebecca Williams comments that the year has seen a number of big players including Foodstuffs New Zealand, Woolworths Australia and The Warehouse, planning to compete in New Zealand’s retail liquor market with stand alone stores. The concern this represents for public health groups is the potential for lower prices and greater availability.

She says it’s pleasing to see the number of local governments responding to alcohol-related disorder by developing, or planning to develop, broad strategies to reduce alcohol-related harm. “On the other hand, some are relying on liquor bans, which appear to work in some situations but not others. We’d like to see longer term solutions.” She is also pleased with the growing number of other groups speaking out in support of strong policies around alcohol, for example the New Zealand Police recommendation this year for lower blood alcohol limits and the Ministry of Social Development’s call for an increase in the tax on alcohol. Also imminent, she says, is consultation on the review of the National Drug Policy. “Hopefully this will provide a strong framework for the implementation of evidence-based policies and improved co-ordination on alcohol harm prevention.”

Alco-Link “a wealth of information on alcohol”

2005 has seen significant development of the Police *Alco-Link* project. Based on the Last Drink Survey model used by Alcohol Healthwatch, the project has involved developing and implementing national systems to collect and collate alcohol-related data, including place of last drink. When processing an alleged offender, officers answer *Alco-Link* questions on the two major forms that are completed as part of Police business. This information is then entered into the national Police I&T system. Specialised reports such as place of last drink have been developed and can be run in ‘real time.’

Project Manager Sandra Murray says that it is exciting to see the wealth of national alcohol information now available. “Next steps for Police include analysing the *Alco-Link* information along with other sources of intelligence to gain a comprehensive profile on alcohol and crime within each district, and to identify opportunities for collaborative interventions.”

(1) Connor, J., Broad, J., Jackson, R., Van de Hoorn, S., Rehm, J. (2005) ALAC Occasional Publication No. 23



Kyp Kypri - researcher

Kyp Kypri is a Senior Research Fellow at the Injury Prevention Research Unit, University of Otago and Senior Lecturer in Population Health at the University of Newcastle, Australia. He has a special

interest in alcohol-related research.

For Kyp the proposal contained in Matt Robson’s private member’s bill this year to put the purchase age back up to 20 years has been the most significant activity in alcohol policy in the country of late.

“Few would have predicted in 1999 that there would be a serious proposal to put the MPA back up to 20 as soon as 2005. Some have suggested that ‘the genie can’t be put back in the bottle’ and that New Zealand should accept the status quo of age 18 and enforce that law effectively.”

However Kyp says that research indicates there are likely to be reductions in alcohol-related harm to young people if the purchase age were increased to 20.

In 1999 New Zealand became the first jurisdiction anywhere in the world in 25 years to reduce the purchase age. He says it was arguably the most important health policy change concerning young people since the liberalisation of alcohol availability in 1989, but, because the government failed to make provision for evaluating the effects, we have had to rely on archival data to determine its impact. The findings of an Injury Prevention Research Unit study using archival data will be published in the January 2006 issue of the American Journal of Public Health.

“We have perhaps been fortunate to be able to produce crude estimates of the excess traffic crash morbidity attributable to the lowering of the purchase age, but measuring the effects of the law change on other outcomes (e.g. assault) using archival data has methodological limitations,” he says. “We need purpose-built studies designed in advance of important law changes to be able to properly evaluate their effects.”

He believes that important policy issues such as the minimum purchase age should be a matter for government policy, not left to the lottery of private members bills, and then to the vagaries of a conscience vote.



Dr Mike MacAvoy - ALAC CEO

“This has been the first fully operational year of ALAC’s culture change programme to change the way we drink.

Our recent research shows New Zealanders are increasingly recognising the existence of a binge drinking culture in this country and are starting to recognise the link between drunkenness and the harms that result.

The research also shows us that while attitudes haven’t changed around the acceptability of drunkenness (and that is to be expected at this stage of the programme), people are beginning to see there is a problem with the way we drink and

they are also making the link between drunkenness and the harms that result.

We at ALAC have been delighted by the support shown for our programme by many agencies ranging from government departments, local government, police and non-government organisations and extend our thanks to all who have been such a support.

We are all working towards the same end – the reduction of alcohol-related harm for New Zealand – and it is good to see a shared vision of how this can be achieved.

However, we cannot be complacent, nor rely on single solutions. I encourage you to continue to remember the whole model our work is based on, and continue to find ways to support all the pillars it comprises, and to really, genuinely and tangibly contribute.”

2005 – the Auckland region

Alcohol Healthwatch interviewed spokespeople from various agencies in the Auckland region, asking them to reflect on significant issues and events in the year.

... a greater focus on intoxication, sales to minors and clubs – Auckland Regional Public Health Service

Andrew Galloway’s team from Auckland Regional Public Health Service is responsible for reporting on liquor licence applications for on and club licences through out the region and has a monitoring role helping to ensure licence conditions are being met. “We have our work cut out for us,” he says.

Reflecting on the year Andrew says they have, to varying degrees, seen a greater focus on intoxication throughout the region. They’ve had the odd opportunity, also, to get media publicity about the effects of excessive alcohol consumption, which Andrew says makes it easier for agencies to raise the issue of intoxication.

A ‘zero tolerance’ stance on sales to minors is generally being taken by enforcement staff, he says — Controlled Purchase Operations are now common place in each area. “A high court ruling this year that minors may lie about their age during these operations has facilitated this — it’s reinforced that they are a fair test for licensees.”

Andrew also highlights increasing concern from enforcement agencies in the region about the potential for liquor abuse within clubs, which will be a focus for agencies in the New Year. In South Auckland, he says, about 20% of arrested offenders who have been drinking in licensed premises had their last drink at a club — often driving offences.

... empowering South Auckland communities to achieve change – Hapai te Hauora Tapui

Hapai te Hauora Tapui has been involved in community action for some time now. As part of their involvement with the Community Action on Youth and Drugs (CAYAD) Project, they have a focus on alcohol use in the Otara, Otahuhu and Papatoetoe areas. In particular they have been working

with the Otara Network Action Committee — consisting of representatives from community groups, agencies and individuals who have the interests of the Otara community at heart. The major issues faced by their community, they say, are excess alcohol consumption contributing to lewd behaviour and ongoing war zones in Otara on a Friday and Saturday. This year Hapai have supported the Otara committee to develop a submission on the Sale of Liquor (Youth Alcohol Harm Reduction) Amendment Bill. The submission supported raising the minimum legal purchase age to 20 years, supported by a range of other effective policy interventions. Lack of support from councils when hearing submissions opposing off-licence premises is an issue highlighted in the submission. “Otara town centre has six liquor outlets per square kilometre – far too excessive,” they say.

... 24 hour licensing – boring without it or a recipe for mayhem?

Also significant in the region this year has been Auckland City Council’s reconsideration of its draft alcohol strategy proposal to allow across the board 24/7 licensing. While 24/7 licensing has been vigorously supported in submissions by licensees, some of whom claim the city would be boring without it, it has been equally vigorously challenged by public health agencies in the region.

... breath testing young people outside premises – The Regional Alcohol Project

One group of challengers to 24 hour licensing have been members of the Ministry of Health funded Regional Alcohol Project. This year the Project commissioned from Massey University a region-wide breath test survey of young drinkers leaving licensed premises. Forty percent of the young patrons surveyed rated themselves as moderately intoxicated, and nearly

half the breath test readings were over the drink-drive limit for people aged 20 or over. Not surprisingly, breath alcohol levels increased with the lateness of the hour.

... thinking about the consequences of supplying – an inter-agency campaign

Also planned for the region over the summer months is a focus on 'social supply' to underage young people. Roy Hunt from the Safer Waitakere Alcohol Project is co-ordinating the inter-agency group which has planned the "Think" campaign. Roy says that parents and older adults are being asked to consider the consequences of supplying alcohol to young people. "Part of the campaign involves increased activity by enforcement agencies attempting to prevent illegal supply. There'll also be a series of radio ads, graphic posters, printed material in licensed premises and media activity."

... police and councils collaborating to minimise alcohol related harm – The Responsible Auckland Region Project

The Responsible Auckland Region Project is a collaborative police and council funded project now 8 months into its

implementation phase. The overall aim of the project, says leader Jackie Ferries, is to minimise alcohol-related harms by creating a regional environment of support for responsible citizens and an enhanced ability to address non-compliant behaviour.

A series of sub-projects consist of teams of technical experts from each partner agency. These groups will be examining strategies and processes that will enable statutory agents to "work smarter and explore consistencies across the region that will benefit compliance".

Two of the sub projects, Vetting and Licencing and Enforcement, have been initiated. The Vetting and Licencing team have completed an informal submission on changes to the Sale of Liquor Act, from an enforcement perspective. This has been submitted to the Ministry of Justice with full endorsement and support from the Auckland Region TLA CEO Forum.

Jackie says the project provides a unique opportunity for technical experts from legislatively responsible agencies across the region to meet regularly and explore some best practice options.

2005 – some significant global developments

May

- Adoption by the 58th World Health Assembly (WHA) of a resolution calling WHO Member States to examine public health problems caused by harmful use of alcohol and to implement effective strategies to reduce negative health and social consequences.
- Discussions highlighting the idea of a Framework Convention on Alcohol Control are met with approval by some country delegates at the WHA, strong opposition by others, notably the USA.
- The Western Pacific Regional Office of WHO begins development of Regional Action Plan to reduce harm done by alcohol.
- Launch of an Indian Alcohol Policy Alliance, an advocacy body consisting of medical, public health and other experts.
- Findings of a large US study suggest that the apparent protective effect of moderate alcohol consumption on cardiovascular disease may be due to residual or unmeasured confounding ⁽¹⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Naimi T., Brown D., Brewer R. et al. (2005) Cardiovascular risk factors and confounders among non-drinking and moderate drinking U.S. adults Am J Prev Med; 28 (4)

July

- Global drinks company Diageo announces plans to provide consumers with a responsible drinking reminders and nutritional information on its products across 180 markets.

August

- The Bangkok Charter for Health Promotion in a Globalised World is adopted. Building on the 1986 Ottawa Charter, it calls on all sectors to advocate, invest, build capacity, regulate and legislate and build partnerships to progress to a healthier world.

October

- Physicians from more than 40 countries at the annual World Medical Association assembly recommend far-reaching population-based measures to reduce the global impact of alcohol on health and society.

December

- Non-government organisations meeting in Auckland decide to launch an Asia Pacific Global Alcohol Policy Alliance.



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*We wish all our readers
a relaxing, fun and safe
Christmas break*