

News Views

The Newsletter of Alcohol Healthwatch

Reviews – A waiting game

Associate Health Minister Damien O'Connor released the Steering Group's report on the Review of the Regulation of Alcohol Advertising on the 4th May 2007. No decisions were announced at the time however, in a rather unusual move the Minister called for feedback on the report.

The Steering Group made some useful recommendations in the report, including the introduction of a legislative structure based on public health goals, one of which being to minimise exposure to those under the legal purchase age. However, the Group considered that a move to government regulation was "not warranted at this time" and their recommendation effectively leaves the reins in the hands of vested interest groups in a system described as "enforced self-regulation".

In their response to the report Alcohol Healthwatch challenged the Steering Group's conclusion that further restrictions were not warranted, identified their level of support for each of the report's recommendations and highlighted their concerns regarding the review process, particularly the role of industry groups.

Alcohol Healthwatch understands that the Minister has decided to announce his decisions together with those arising from the Review of the Sale and Supply to Minors currently underway. The terms of reference for this review gives no specific completion date, only that it would be progressed this year.

There has been no public consultation involved in this latter review process. Some groups who indicated they would like to be involved were invited to a workshop – the invitation clearly spelling out that this was not a consultation. At the workshop, hosted by the Ministry of Justice, participants were advised that the issue of price was not on the agenda. This was despite an assurance by Minister O'Connor, in a press release announcing the review that *'the scope of the review would mean that the underlying causes of harm to youth arising from drinking would be fully canvassed'*.

Given the gravity of the youth drinking issue, the fact that a key issue like price can be sidelined is concerning.

Meanwhile....

Alcohol Advertising Exposed

Findings from recent studies shine an eerie light on the exposure to alcohol advertising by those under the legal purchase age.

Numerous overseas studies have given cause for concern, linking exposure to alcohol advertising with increased likelihood of drinking, drinking earlier and more heavily. It is also linked with developing more positive expectations towards drinking. With these New Zealand studies we are able to build a more comprehensive picture here.

A study undertaken recently by the Centre for Social and Health Outcomes Research and Evaluation (SHORE) at Massey University estimates that about 90% of 5-17 year olds are exposed to alcohol advertising on television at least once a week, almost the same rate as those aged 18-29 years.

Between 2002 and 2004 5-14 year olds saw on average 569 alcohol advertisements per year on television alone. The 10-17 year age group saw on average 632, compared with 736 for the 18-29 year old group.

While exposure to television advertising looks to have decreased between the years 2003 and 2005, there has been a significant upwards trend since 1992 when alcohol brand advertising was allowed in the broadcast media. The recent reduction in television exposure appears to coincide with a reduction in expenditure on alcohol advertising in the traditional broadcast media. Alcohol Healthwatch Director Rebecca Williams says this is unlikely to represent reduced exposure but rather indicates a trend towards the use of and therefore increased exposure to other forms of marketing communications such as those via internet and mobile phones.

These newer marketing approaches are cheaper and utilise interactive approaches, making use of the consumer's own friends and networks. They are difficult to monitor and tend to slip beneath the radar of parental monitoring.

The SHORE study finds a strong positive correlation between both expenditure on and exposure to alcohol advertising and subsequent alcohol brand allegiance. Therefore it is of no surprise to see the brands with the highest expenditure showing up in other independent youth surveys.

Both the 2004 Year 6 Youth Lifestyle Survey and the 2006 Year 10 In-depth Survey undertaken by the Health Sponsorship Council (HSC) included questions relating to alcohol advertising and brand awareness.

In the 2004 HSC survey 93% of the Year 6 respondents associated Lion Red with beer. The percentage of youth associating other beer brands with beer included: Tui – 87%, Speights – 81%, Heineken – 73% and Steinlager – 72%. This compared with 97% associating Pizza Hut and Burger King with food. Interestingly, the percentage associating tobacco brands with smoking ranged from 12-55%.

The advertising of tobacco and sponsorship by tobacco companies was prohibited by the Smokefree Environments Act in 1990.

The HSC 2006 Year 10 survey highlights Tui as the most favoured brand by both male and female respondents. The SHORE study identifies Tui to be one of the beer brands with the largest expenditure on advertising on TV, radio and bill-board between the years 2001 and 2005.

The Year 10 survey also shows that TV was the most likely place for these young people to have been exposed to advertising with 83% reporting having seen an alcohol ad in the last 7 days. This compared with about 66% on radio, 38% on a bill-board, 49% in a magazine and 35% in a newspaper.

A recent qualitative study undertaken by Whariki Research Group, also at Massey University, highlights not only young people's association with specific alcohol brands but also links brands with drinking to intoxication. The following quotes are 15 – 17 years old from focus group discussions on alcohol marketing:

QUOTE

"I was just like yes *Smirnoff Blue, Smirnoff Blue*, I'm going to get so wasted tonight. I was in the taxi and I was like passing it back to see if anyone wanted it, and everyone was no screw that shit, and I had it straight. I was just like going, oh you guys are just pussies" (Ed, 17 years)

QUOTE

"At the *Lion Red* fishing contest ... you see like slaughtered people, absolutely trolleyed and it's just awesome (Mark, 15 years)

Williams says all eyes will be on Ministers Burton and O'Connor as they determine their policy response to the advertising and the sale and supply to minors reviews.

The protection of children and young people from alcohol marketing messages and other risk factors such as cheap liquor and easy access must be paramount. Minor tweaks of current policy and continued industry self regulation simply won't achieve the necessary change.

The current environment concerning alcohol is unsupportive of harm prevention efforts.

How low can you go?

Despite liquor industry warnings of increased prices due to increased taxes and production costs the price of alcohol remains cheap.

Alcohol Healthwatch has looked at some recent retail offers to assess just how low prices go.

The "lowest of the low" award goes to a 'light spirits range' advertised by The Mill off-licence chain. The 1000ml bottles (13.9% abv) were advertised for \$6.99, or 64 cents per standard drink, in June this year. The same chain offered low prices on ready-to-drink (RTD) products, some as low as \$1.00 per 330ml bottle. Well known spirit brands such as Gordon's Gin and Smirnoff Vodka were available for \$24.99 (1000ml bottle) and a 12 pack of DB Bitter (330ml cans) sold for \$7.99. That's beer at around 67 cents a can/standard drink.

The Warehouse Cellars – "Everyday bargains for everyone" - recently advertised a 2 for \$50 deal for 24 packs (330ml) of Tui and Export Gold beers. This equates to \$1.04 a standard drink. Speight's and Lion Red 12 packs were available for \$13.99 or \$1.07 per standard drink. Heineken 12 packs were available for \$16.99 (\$1.42) and Mac's Gold 12 pack for \$15.45 (\$1.29).

The 2 for \$50 deals extended to 1 litre bottles of New Zealand whiskey. These sorts of deals encourage consumers to 'buy up', purchasing more than they otherwise might. The individual bottle price on the whiskey was \$33.99. At \$25 each and 37.5% alcohol by volume, these bottles contain about 30 standard drinks. That's 83 cents per standard drink.

The Warehouse manages to get around the law that forbids supermarkets and other grocery outlets from selling spirits and spirit-based drinks by using the "store within a store" concept.

Supermarkets are also big players in the price wars. New World recently advertised 12 packs of Lion Red, Waikato Draught and Speights Gold Medal Ale at \$12.99, equivalent to \$1.08 a 330ml bottle/standard drink. Export Gold and Tui 15 packs were available for \$15.99 or \$1.06 a 330ml bottle.

Bottles of wine (750ml) are also available for as low as \$5.99 or 72 cents per standard drink.

Our latest national drinking survey (Alcohol Use in New Zealand 2004) estimated that nearly 30% of New Zealand drinkers aged 12-65 years consumed amounts beyond the recommended upper limits on a typical drinking occasion. Around 50% of drinkers aged 18-24 years drank beyond these levels. With prices as low as this, ready availability and highly competitive marketing do we really see this changing anytime soon?

In Britain recently there has been a call for a 10% increase in the tax on alcohol to reduce harm and fund treatment for abuse.

In New Zealand the government nets around \$590 million a year in alcohol tax. The Alcohol Advisory Council (ALAC) receives a small separate levy, around \$12 million a year, to undertake their work.

On the other hand alcohol harm has costs the country anywhere between \$1.4 billion – 16 billion a year.

Around the GLOBE....

....USA

The Surgeon General of the United States recently highlighted that alcohol is the most widely used substance of abuse among America's youth and a major public health issue. In his 'Call to Action' to prevent and reduce underage drinking, he stated that alcohol companies have a responsibility to see that youth are not disproportionately exposed to alcohol marketing.

In September 2003, alcohol industry trade associations agreed to restrict their advertising in measured media to outlets where youth comprise 30% or less of the audience. However, this represents about the percentage of youth in the general population. The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine urged the industry to move its advertising to media where youth audiences are below 15%.

An Oregon study has found that grocery and convenience stores are more likely than liquor stores to sell alcohol to young looking 21 year olds without asking for ID. The PIRE Prevention Research Center sent 'decoys' into alcohol outlets in 45 communities in Oregon to conduct the study. It was found that 38% of convenience store clerks sold alcohol without asking for ID, compared to 14% of clerks at liquor stores. Lead author of the study Mallie Paschall, suggested law enforcement agents carry out more frequent compliance checks at outlets most likely to sell alcohol to underage patrons.

Anheuser-Busch's 12% alcohol flavored beverages called "Spykes" have been permanently withdrawn from the U.S. market. Spykes were nail-polish-bottle-size, alcohol shots containing caffeine and guarana and ginseng, to add to beer or drink straight. Coming in flavors seductively called hot melon, spicy mango, hot chocolate and spicy lime they made a splash on teen Internet chat rooms and upset parents and public health advocates including Attorney Generals in 29 States (Marin Institute May 2007).



....EUROPE

Ireland

The 2007 Eurobarometer of "Attitudes Toward Alcohol" found that Ireland has the highest rates of binge drinking in the European Union. One in three (34%) Irish people questioned in the survey regularly binge-drink. Saint Patrick's Day (17th May) is said to be the one of the prompts for heavy drinking. In recent years there has been concern around underage drinking on Saint Patrick's Day and the associated problem of violence. This year Police patrolled many off-licences and there were calls for licensed premises

to restrict their opening hours in an effort to prevent excessive drinking. Finland had the 2nd highest rate of binge-drinking (27%), followed by Great Britain (24%) and Denmark (23%). These rates can be compared to that of Italy and Greece where only 2% of the people said that they did binge-drink.

According to the latest Oireachtas 2007 report to Parliament, alcohol abuse in Ireland is linked to sponsorship of sporting events by alcohol companies. The cross-party report drawn up by the Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. It states that young people are repeatedly being exposed to high-level alcohol promotions "inculcating pro-drinking attitudes" and "increasing the likelihood of heavier drinking".

Scotland

A voluntary industry ban on selling "slammers" and "shooters" has been considered by the Portman Group in Scotland. It has been suggested that this proposal was in response to a World Health Organisation report which showed that 43% of 15 year olds in Scotland drink alcohol at least once a week. One of the report's recommendations is that sponsorship of sport be sought outside the alcohol industry.

Norway

Time series data for violent crime and per capita alcohol consumption in Norway over 100 years was analysed controlling for seven major covariates. The analysis determined that an increase in alcohol consumption of 1 litre per year per inhabitant predicted a change of approximately 8% in the violence rate when other factors are controlled for, supporting the assumption of a causal effect of alcohol consumption on violence. <http://alcoholreports.blogspot.com>

....CANADA

FASD costs \$23,700 a year to care for a child with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder over and above a child with normal development, according to a new study presented at the Canadian Paediatric Society Meeting in Montreal. Across all children with FASD in Canada, the overall annual cost of this preventable harm adds up to more than half a billion dollars annually. The study of 200 children with FASD and their caregivers was carried out by a team at St Michael's Hospital and the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto included the additional cost of medical care, education as well as lost productivity.

FASD can have a life-long devastating effect on the individual and their family but according to the study author, Brenda Stade "*The study results demonstrated the cost burden of FASD in Canada was profound*".

....AUSTRALIA

Australasia has its first diagnostic service for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). FASD is internationally recognised as the leading cause of preventable disability in children in the Western World and it is clear from evidence

that diagnosis plays a pivotal role in the prevention of FASD and for the delivery of cost-effective intervention for affected individuals and their families. Yet Australia and New Zealand have historically had no multi disciplinary diagnostic or support services.

ARBIAS, the Alcohol Related Brain Injury Australian Services, is the organisation providing the service in partnership with the National Organisation for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Related Disorders (NOFASARD) and the Russell Family Fetal Alcohol Disorders Fund.

According to the Chief Executive Officer of ARBIAS, Sonia Berton, "The lack of services in Australia for people with FASD has, resulted in misdiagnosis of this condition, lack of awareness amongst the general community and health, education and allied welfare sector, inappropriate support for people with FASD and families and no uniform response to addressing what is largely a preventable disability."

The FASD Diagnostic and Support Service will be fully operational on Monday 16th July 2007, where people suspected of FASD can download a referral form for assessment by visiting the organization's website www.arbias.org.au

A **Petition** requesting the Federal Government to legislate that all alcohol beverages sold in Australia carry warning labels highlighting that drinking alcohol while pregnant may cause birth defects has been launched. The motion was moved and passed at the 1st National Conference on FASD hosted by The Drug Education Network in Tasmania in June 2007 and delegates signed the petition. The petition can be viewed at:

<http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/alcohol-use-in-pregnancy-labels-needed-to-warn-of-risks.html>

New Book on FAS

For the first time New Zealand women share their stories about the effects their drinking alcohol during pregnancy has on their children in a new book authored by researcher Jenny Salmon. The book entitled "*Fetal Alcohol Syndrome: New Zealand Birth Mothers' Experiences*" documents the journeys of 8 birth mothers raising children disabled by alcohol before they were born. Their stories include the struggles to advocate for their children's needs within uncomprehending and unsympathetic systems. The book is a must read for any woman choosing motherhood, their health professionals and the wider health, social, education and justice sectors. The open and candid recollections shared by these women will help everyone to understand how better to respond to this serious, sensitive and avoidable harm. The book can be ordered from Dunmore Publishing by contacting books@dunmore.co.nz or www.dunmore.co.nz

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

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Targeting Drink Drivers

It is becoming evident that the hard fought gains in reducing the road toll associated with drinking and driving are starting to dwindle. National Road Safety Manager of NZ Police Dave Cliff went public earlier this year with his wish to see lower blood alcohol limits for driving.

It also appears that women are making a major contribution to the havoc on the roads. There have been reports of women recording particularly high blood alcohol levels.

Alcohol Healthwatch is hosting a forum for Auckland stakeholders to discuss these and other issues and identify actions to reduce alcohol-related road death and injury.

Auckland Regional Alcohol and Road Safety Forum

Tuesday 31 July 2007

Waipuna Conference Centre

**For outcomes and further information please
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Announcement

FASD Network goes National

Following discussion and consultation with members of the Auckland Regional Fetal Alcohol Network (ARFAN) and other stakeholders Alcohol Healthwatch is proud to announce that ARFAN is now a national network.

The network will be known as the Fetal Alcohol Network of New Zealand (FANNZ) and provide the linkage and support for the many organisations and individuals interested in and working to reduce the effects of alcohol use during pregnancy.

Network co-ordinator Christine Rogan of Alcohol Healthwatch says that nothing really will change other than more people will be able to benefit from the information sharing and support offered by the network.

For more information or to join the network please contact Christine at fannz@ahw.co.nz or (09) 520 7037



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