

Date 26 March 2008

PHAA calls on Senate to take broad view on alcohol

“Intervening in alcohol policy is not only appropriate for government,” according to Public Health Association (PHA) CEO, Michael Moore, “It is a responsibility”. The Public Health Association has made a submission to the Senate Community Affairs Committee on Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill 2007. While supporting the legislation that is before the Senate, the submission calls on the Committee to take a broader view of alcohol issues in our community.

“The objects of the Bill (Section 3) receive the full support of the PHA,” said Mr Moore. “However, we have asked the Committee to consider some minor amendments that ensure public health issues are taken into account”.

PHAA has identified in our submission that there are considerable health issues arising from the hazardous and harmful use of alcohol. The harms are experienced across the whole community. For example, National Drug Research Institute in West Australia’s Professor Steve Allsop and his colleague Tanya Chikritzhs have published the following:

- *Some research indicates that as much as 60% of all police attendances and 90% of all late night calls involve alcohol;*
- *In the 12 months prior to June 2000, NSW police identified as alcohol-related almost 14,000 assault incidents (23% of all such incidents) and over 5,000 offensive behaviour incidents (58% of all such incidents);*
- *Between 1993/94 and 2000/01 over half a million Australians were hospitalised due to risky/high-risk drinking, some 110,000 of whom were older Australians (65yrs+). These admissions are costly - in a single year in this period, alcohol problems demanded 400,000 hospital bed-days.*

The success of government intervention with regard to tobacco has been a great accomplishment. It provides a rationale for governments taking a role in intervening in the free market when there is considerable evidence of harmful use of a product. At the same time the PHA recognises that there are beneficial health and social effects of moderate alcohol consumption.

The Senate Committee can play a key role in examining the range of options available at present. There would be a significant contribution to community health if the Committee would adopt a bipartisan approach to the issue with recommendations such as using price as a disincentive, funding of advertising and health promotion campaigns to compete with industry efforts and to support media restrictions as set out in the Bill that is being examined.

Full submission may be viewed on www.phaa.net.au

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Contact: Michael Moore, CEO 0417 249 731(m) 02 6247 2304 (h) mmoore@phaa.net.au

The Public Health Association of Australia is a non-party-political organisation with a membership drawn from more than 40 health-related professions. The Association makes a major contribution to health policy in Australia and has branches in every State and Territory. www.phaa.net.au