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MEDIA RELEASE

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Health experts support moves to reduce alcohol violence and disorder

Health and medical experts have come out in support of proposed reforms aimed at reducing alcohol-related violence in the city streets, despite pressure being applied by hotel lobby groups to maintain conditions as they are.

The NSW Branch of the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA), representing more than 300 public health experts, has commended the Sydney City Council in its attempt to reduce the toll of interpersonal and domestic violence and injury that results from excessive late night drinking every week.

The PHAA NSW Branch's support follows reported concerns industry lobbying would impact the proposed changes to the late-night Development Control Plan (DCP), aimed at curtailing alcohol-related violence, a significant problem on Sydney's streets.

Alcohol intoxication is one of the leading causes of injury in Australia. Associate Professor Kate Conigrave from the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) said there is substantial evidence that drinking alcohol in certain settings presents higher risks of injury than in others. "Alcohol-related violence was highlighted years ago during the alcohol summit and the community recognised the need to take action. Yet little progress has been made, which is very disappointing," Associate Professor Conigrave said.

"Having large numbers of people drinking late into the night often leads to violence and injury. Some drinking venues undoubtedly contribute more to these problems than others. The excessive numbers of injuries that take place every weekend are due to late night drinking and form an enormous burden of unnecessary work for emergency departments and police."

Associate Professor Conigrave argues that while current conditions may be of benefit to the hotel industry, the people of NSW suffer the consequences of violence. "We see too many bashed patients attending hospital Emergency Departments and there are too many drunk and violent people for the police to handle. It is time to limit late night trading of alcohol and to focus on individual venues with poor records. These measures are known to reduce injuries."

The city of Newcastle is evidence to the success of reform, recently showing a one-third reduction in drunken violence following a reduction in late night opening hours.

The PHAA NSW Branch supports the Sydney City Council's proposal and urges the Premier to facilitate its implementation. The PHAA also recognises that any changes in the availability of alcohol are just one way of reducing the impact of alcohol-related injury, interpersonal and domestic violence. Other actions are needed to combat the serious problems caused by alcohol including fiscal measures, legislative policies, controls on alcohol promotion and education, and enforcement of existing laws about not serving alcohol to intoxicated and/or underage people.

For further information/comment:

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