



Media Release

Alliance of leading health groups converge on Parliament House to put alcohol pricing on Tax Forum agenda

6 July 2011, Canberra: A coalition of Australia's leading health bodies will today converge on Parliament House to call on the Federal Government to put alcohol pricing on the agenda of the upcoming Federal Tax Forum in October.

Led by the National Alliance for Action on Alcohol (NAAA), health experts representing over 50 organisations from across Australia will hold briefings with more than 50 parliamentarians from all sides of politics throughout the day. The discussions will focus on the impact of pricing policies in reducing the harms caused by alcohol and the \$36 billion annual cost in Australia.

NAAA Co-Chair and Cancer Council Victoria CEO, Todd Harper said Australians have spoken and the majority are signalling support for action on preventing alcohol-related harms.

"A recent poll¹ into community behaviours and attitudes towards alcohol paints a compelling picture – 80% of Australians believe we have a problem with excess drinking or alcohol abuse, 82% feel more needs to be done to tackle this problem, and almost 60% believe governments need to take greater responsibility," Mr Harper said.

"The situation isn't helped by the fact that with just two dollars, people can now buy a bottle of wine for less than a bottle of water. The current practice of selling cheap alcohol is in part a result of what the Henry Review calls an 'incoherent' alcohol taxation system, where beer alone is taxed in eight different ways and wine is taxed less than packaged, low-alcohol beer.

A report² into over 112 peer-reviewed studies found that increasing prices and taxes resulted in a drop in overall consumption levels and heavy drinking. Evidence also shows there's a direct link between increasing the price of alcohol and reductions in acute and chronic ill-health, accidents, crime and violent incidents.

NAAA Co-Chair and Director of the McCusker Centre for Action on Alcohol and Youth (MCAAY) Professor Mike Daube said: "The evidence shows very clearly that price and taxation policies are vital to reducing the harms caused by alcohol.

"The impact of alcohol pricing on young people is especially important. We urgently need action to change a culture in which young people are increasingly drinking to get drunk. One Australian teenager dies and 60 are hospitalised each week because of alcohol-related problems³. More than 40% of 16 – 17 year olds say they drink to get drunk. Price is a crucial component in the action needed to change this culture."

The World Health Organisation (WHO)⁴ has also concluded that increasing the price of alcohol will reduce the number of young people who are heavy drinkers, as well as reducing underage drinking, and binge drinking.

Professor Daube said: "Within the wider population, we see that the impact of alcohol misuse goes way beyond the drinker. A recent study⁵ commissioned by the Alcohol Education & Rehabilitation Foundation found that a person dies each day because of someone else's drinking, while there are 30,000 victims of alcohol-related domestic violence and 20,000 cases of alcohol-related child abuse each year.

"But if you would prefer to use findings from the Government's Henry Review, then we can talk about the spill over costs of alcohol abuse which are cited to include foetal damage and child abuse, domestic violence, road accidents, crime and violence, increased mortality and a range of diseases and medical conditions, including cancer."

According to Mr Harper, alcohol pricing and taxation policies have not only been proven to reduce harms, but are also highly cost-effective. "It's been estimated that tax measures could reduce the social costs of alcohol in Australia by between 14 and 39%⁶," he said.

"What we would like is a commitment from government to an explicit discussion about alcohol pricing at the Tax Forum due to held on 4-5 October this year."

Health experts who will hold briefings with parliamentarians today include:

- Cancer Council Victoria CEO, Todd Harper
- McCusker Centre for Action on Alcohol and Youth (MCAAY), Director Professor Mike Daube
- National Drug Research Institute (NDRI), Assoc Professor Tanya Chikritzhs
- Alcohol Education & Rehabilitation Foundation, CEO Michael Thorn
- Australian Drug Foundation (ADF), CEO John Rogerson
- Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA), CEO Michael Moore
- Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, Deputy Chair Dr John Crozier
- People's Alcohol Action Coalition (Northern Territory), Dr John Boffa
- Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, Professor Robin Room
- Addiction Journal, Commissioning Editor Peter Miller
- Alcohol and Other Drugs Council of Australia (ADCA), Patron Professor Ian Webster
- Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Council SA (ADAC), Director Scott Wilson
- National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC), Professor Mike Farrell
- Alcohol Education & Rehabilitation Foundation, Director David Crosbie

References:

¹The AER Foundation-commissioned Galaxy study was conducted between 14th to 17th January 2011. It was national online survey (excluding NT) and was weighted by age, gender and location (based on ABS population estimates) to the national population. There were 1,009 respondents aged 18 years and above.

²Wagenaar AC, Salois MJ and Komro KA (2009) Effects of beverage alcohol price and tax levels on drinking: a meta-analysis of 1003 estimates from 112 studies. *Addiction* 104: 179-190.

³National Medical Health and Research Council

(link: http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/your_health/healthy/alcohol/burden.htm#oz)

⁴World Health Organisation (WHO), Expert Committee on problems related to alcohol consumption 2007: *Second report*, technical report series no. 944, provisional edition, pp. 42–43

⁵Laslett, A-M., Catalano, P., Chikritzhs, T., Dale, C., Doran, C., Ferris, J., Jainullabudeen, T., Livingston, M, Matthews, S., Mugavin, J., Room, R., Schlotterlein, M. and Wilkinson, C. (2010), *The Range and Magnitude of Alcohol's Harm to Others*. Fitzroy, Victoria: AER Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre, Eastern Health.

⁶Cobiac, L., Vos, T., Doran, C., Wallace, A (2009) Cost-effectiveness of interventions to prevent alcohol-related disease and injury in Australia, *Addiction*, 104, 1646–1655add_2708
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