



15/26

The Research Director
Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee
Parliament House
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Dear Research Director

I am writing to you today in relation to the consultation on *Tackling alcohol-fuelled violence Legislation Amendment Bill 2015*. As an organisation representing medical practitioners, the Australian Medical Association (AMA) has long been concerned about the rates of alcohol-related violence within the community. Unfortunately excessive alcohol consumption has become common place in Australia, and Government action is overdue.

Alcohol-fuelled-violence in Queensland, and in fact, throughout Australia is a significant problem. Last year, the AMA hosted a National Summit on Alcohol. The Summit brought together a range of experts from sectors, such as emergency medicine, policing, domestic violence, child development and welfare, communications, advertising and social media, general practice, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and addiction medicine, to name a few. Importantly attendees also heard from the victims of alcohol related violence. A particularly moving keynote speech was delivered by the parents of Thomas Kelly who was killed as a direct result of alcohol related violence.

The message arising from the Summit was clear. Federal Government action on alcohol is overdue.

The AMA believes that the Federal Government must finalise the new National Alcohol Strategy as a matter of priority, and in doing this, genuinely engage with State and Territory Governments to ensure a coordinated and consistent approach to reducing alcohol-related harm. I have attached a copy of the National Alcohol Summit Communique for your reference. It provides further detail on the AMA's recommendations for the Federal Government on alcohol.

In the meantime, initiatives such as the *Tackling alcohol-fuelled violence Legislation Amendment Bill 2015*, must be congratulated. Measures that seek to reduce Australia's culture of binge drinking, and that reduce availability and access to alcohol will have positive impacts on the health system and on the broader community. Reducing the availability of alcohol via lockouts and designated last drink times, as well as restriction on the availability of take away alcohol, should noticeably reduce the incidence of alcohol-related violence.

The Federal AMA is particularly pleased to see that there are plans for further consultation around possible restrictions on the availability of 'rapid intoxication drinks'. The reality is that when consumed rapidly any type of alcoholic beverage will result in intoxication. However, the sale of shots is problematic as these standard drinks are typically consumed in a single mouthful. Drinkers can fairly quickly lose track of the number of shots they have consumed, and become extremely intoxicated in a very short amount of time. Some venues voluntarily refuse to serve shots and also limit customers to two drinks per order. These potential solutions should be canvassed further.

Another area of concern for the AMA is the combination of alcohol and so called 'energy drinks'. The mixture of alcohol (a depressant) with high levels of caffeine (a stimulant) has problematic physiological impacts, particularly for cardiovascular health. Consuming alcohol and energy drinks is likely to leave drinkers with the perception that they are less intoxicated than they actually are, resulting in poor decision making and increased risk taking. Alcohol and energy drink combinations, regardless of whether they are sold in pre mixed containers or mixed at a license venue, should be outlawed.

I would like to reiterate the Federal AMA's support for evidence based measures that seek to reduce the impact of excessive alcohol consumption. If implemented, the *Tackling alcohol-fuelled violence Legislation Amendment Bill 2015* will see the Queensland Government taking an important leadership role in reducing alcohol-related violence in the State.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Parnis', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr Stephen Parnis
Vice President
21 December 2015



AMA NATIONAL ALCOHOL SUMMIT COMMUNIQUE

The far-reaching impacts of alcohol-related harm underlie why Australia urgently needs a whole-of-government strategy to drive and coordinate action to address these factors.

The AMA is committed to reducing the harms from alcohol and the unacceptable impact they have on our citizens and community. The AMA believes these harms can only be effectively tackled through a nationally led strategy of high impact campaigns to change behaviours and address unhealthy drinking culture, effective regulation, and early intervention and treatment.

We look to the Australian Government to provide this leadership to address this significant health and social issue for the Australian community.

The AMA's call to action

As doctors and public health practitioners, we are at the frontline in dealing with the devastating effects of excess alcohol.

But addressing harmful alcohol use is not just the responsibility of the medical profession – prevention at every level is a shared responsibility.

This National Alcohol Summit has drawn together people from government, community leaders, medical and health experts, police, families of victims, and people who have experienced first-hand the myriad of harms that arise from alcohol. These are the voices of Australia's collective concern about this priority public health problem.

The harms associated with excess alcohol consumption are very significant for individuals and for society as a whole, and warrant our community's comprehensive response. Successful prevention and early intervention will minimise the effect of factors that contribute to harmful alcohol use, and promote and strengthen the factors that protect against that behaviour.

State and territory governments, in conjunction with local governments, can make a big difference, particularly in relation to the density of drinking establishments, opening hours and policing licenses.

But at the heart of the solution is our national leader. There is an urgent and unmet need for the **Australian Government** to tackle this problem with more robust and rigorous policy and

regulation to supplement parental oversight and responsibility.

Without that leadership, commitment and coordination, we at the frontline will continue to mop up the devastation caused by alcohol in Australia – the road fatalities, the victims of violence, the children who suffer the effects of the drinking around them.

The outcome of this summit is a call to action to the Australian Government – a call to develop an ambitious, comprehensive and world-leading National Alcohol Strategy to be funded and implemented from the 2015 Federal Budget, with eight defined outcome areas for reducing harm, funding major initiatives, tracking outcomes, sponsoring research and evaluation, and coordinating responsible regulatory and licensing provisions across states and territories.

The Australian Government's new National Alcohol Strategy should:

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- 1)** specify a clear role for the Australian Government in coordinating a consistent approach across the nation to access and availability provisions.

 - 2)** include the development and implementation of effective and sustained advertising and community-led social marketing campaigns that address the public's understanding of unsafe drinking and the harms of excess alcohol use. Campaigns should target a range of priority audiences, including young people and pregnant women.

 - 3)** include the increased availability of specialised alcohol prevention and treatment services throughout the community, including: GP-led services and referral mechanisms; community-led interventions; safe sobering up facilities; increased availability of addiction medicine specialist services; treatment and detoxification services at all major hospitals; and services for acute alcohol abuse at hospitals with emergency departments.

 - 4)** include measures which specifically respond to the particular needs and preferences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and other culturally and linguistically diverse groups.

 - 5)** include the development and implementation of statutory regulation of alcohol marketing and promotion, independently of the alcohol and advertising industries, with meaningful sanctions for non-compliance. Particular attention should be paid to sponsorship and promotion in the community and professional sporting industries.

 - 6)** specify indicators and methods to monitor and measure alcohol use, alcohol sales data, and alcohol-related harms across the Australian community, and the effectiveness of different alcohol treatment options. Data collected by government departments and authorities should be readily available to alcohol researchers and program evaluators.

 - 7)** include a review of current alcohol taxation and pricing arrangements and how they can be reformed to discourage harmful drinking.

 - 8)** ensure transparent and independent policy development by prohibiting political donations from the alcohol industry and developing a code of conduct on government engagement with alcohol industry in line with the WHO's recommendations.
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