



Mr Elton Humphery  
Senate Committee Inquiry  
Community Affairs Committee  
[Community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:Community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au)

Dear Mr Humphery,

**Re: Submission to the Senate Committee Inquiry in relation to the Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill 2007 (closing date 20 March 2008)**

Thank you for your letter dated 19 February 2008. We commend the Committee for taking such an ethical step towards creating and promoting a culture of responsible drinking, in an attempt to reduce binge drinking, especially among young people.

Please find attached our submission for the inquiry on the Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill 2007. We are particularly interested in the relationship between alcohol consumption and the increase in reported incidents of domestic and family violence, child abuse, and incarceration, all of which are factors that lead to serious social problems and weaken the family unit, which is the corner stone of our society.

Should you wish to discuss our submission further, please contact Sylvia Ghaly, Manager: Policy and Membership, on 9281 8822 or email [sylvia@acwa.asn.au](mailto:sylvia@acwa.asn.au).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Andrew McCallum'.

Andrew McCallum  
*CEO*

12 March 2008

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As the peak organisation in NSW representing non-government agencies delivering out-of-home care services, the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) is committed to supporting the development of a true civil society which promotes, encourages and facilitates a greater level of engagement and participation from the non-government sector in responding to interrelated social issues.

In relation to the Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill 2007, ACWA supports the Bill, which aims at creating a culture of responsible drinking, and facilitating a reduction in the alcohol toll resulting from excessive alcohol consumption.

ACWA is particularly interested in minimising the impact of excessive alcohol consumption in feeding the cycle of social dysfunctionality, particularly among vulnerable and disadvantaged groups including low income earners, unemployed people, homeless people, people with mental health illnesses including people with aggressive tendencies, and young people who have to deal with identity issues and peer pressure which mark their rite of passage from childhood to adulthood, among other groups.

We support the introduction of health information labels on all alcohol products. Printing health information labels is likely to be read and considered by those who are health conscious and who have a developed sense of well-being. These labels, however, will not necessarily deter people, especially young people who consider drinking alcohol is 'cool' and people who have developed a certain degree of dependency on alcohol, from consuming alcohol.

By the same token, while we support the restriction of television and radio advertisements to specific times, to reduce the frequency and the duration of air time, and ban alcohol advertisements that are aimed at children or link drinking to fame and success, we believe that more needs to be done if we are serious about containing the problem of excessive alcohol consumption, especially among young people.

Alcohol consumption is and has always been accepted as part of the social norm. It is considered an acceptable social practice among adults and is part of the social culture. Alcohol consumption in itself should not be condemned. However, excessive alcohol consumption, which is likely to affect one's judgement, alter one's behaviour, and cause serious health and social problems, should.

We believe that there is a need for a holistic strategy that involves promotion, support and legislation in order to change social behaviour towards the excess consumption of alcohol and promote a culture of responsible consumption of alcohol.

We recommend the following:

***Promote the facts about Alcohol:***

In line with adding health information labels on all alcohol products as outlined in the Bill, we suggest running a 'responsible alcohol consumption campaign' in all media to promote the side effect of excessive consumption, the nature of alcohol as a depressant, which would refute the idea of 'drinking to sheer up', the addictive nature of alcohol as a substance, and its ability to alter one's behaviour and accentuate depression and aggressive tendencies. Promoting the facts challenges myths embedded in our cultural sub-conscience.

To target young people, these messages could be reflected in Australian soap operas geared towards a younger audience such as *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, which reflect, and sometimes shape, cultural norms for young people. The same messages could be circulated as part of YouTube videos and other web engines targeting young people.

It is equally important to educate parents to enable them to talk to their children about the pros and cons of consuming alcohol and of responsible drinking. A well-adjusted teenager who is used to consuming reasonable amounts of alcohol under parental supervision is more likely to resist peer pressure and the novelty of drinking alcohol until losing conscience in a public space.

Promoting alcohol free events and providing consumers with alternative techniques to enjoy a drink without getting drunk are equally important. Encouraging and promoting the supply of alcohol with meals, and the benefits of alternating between alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks are simple yet effective mechanisms which could be used to educate the general public about responsible alcohol consumption.

***Provide support to those who have, or are likely to develop, alcohol consumption problems:***

While prevention in most cases is the best cure, we acknowledge that there is an increasing number of individuals in our society who have alcohol consumption problems. As part of a holistic approach to promote responsible alcohol consumption in the society, it is important to provide those who are struggling with the support they need by investing in rehabilitation centres and groups such as Alcoholic Anonymous or similar.

If we are serious about addressing the social issues associated with excessive alcohol consumption, it is important not to stigmatise people who are struggling with alcohol problems so that help can reach them. It is equally important to provide them with an opportunity to link with other support network and resources to address social issues that might contribute to, or develop as the result of, their alcohol consumption problem. Networks and support groups might include relationship counselling, employment services, mental health support, and depression support groups.

Having specialised support groups to work with young people is also important, as young people are likely to tackle their problems and to respond to peer pressure differently. While there is a scope to target high school and tertiary students, it is important not to forget that a large number of young people are not necessarily enrolled in any educational institution and they are likely to be as vulnerable, if not more, when it comes to alcohol consumption and peer pressure.

***Regulate the Industry, and toughen and reinforce the legislation:***

There is a need to review the supply/demand ratio before issuing new premises with licenses. In some cases, it would be imperative to decline applications where the market is saturated with licensed premises.

It is also important to review the cost of acquiring a license and how the revenues are being proportioned to benefit the community (same as with the gambling and racing industries).

Regulating advertising is a step in the right direction. However, we strongly believe that advertising of alcohol beverages should be totally banned, with the exception of promotional

materials displayed inside liquor shops, pubs and bars where alcohol beverages are being sold or served. Distributing weekly discount catalogues promoting alcohol beverages has the potential of encouraging children and young people to consume alcohol.

While we are not condemning alcohol consumption in general, we do condemn promoting alcohol consumption in any shape or form. Same as with smoking, promoting alcohol publicly should be banned. The money allocated to advertising alcoholic beverages could be better spent on addressing the social problems caused by excessive alcoholic consumption, especially when the human services sector across the nation is so under resourced and is struggling to cope with the increase in demand for more and better services to deal with complex social issues.

Patrolling beaches, parks, public transport and other public areas where alcohol restrictions apply, and confiscating alcohol beverages send the message that the government and the community are serious about promoting responsible drinking. That would require more patrolling personnel (both security and police officers). Toughening the laws that governs providing alcohol beverages to minors is another area where the government need to step up to protect the younger generation.

In conclusion, while the Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill 2007 is a step in the right direction and we support it, we believe that more could and should be done, using a holistic approach, if we are serious about creating a culture of responsible drinking and discouraging excessive alcohol consumption in the community, especially among young people.