

**Senate Community Affairs Committee**

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

**Additional Estimates 2016 – 17, 1 March 2017**

**Ref No:** SQ17-000164

**OUTCOME:** 1 - Health System Policy, Design and Innovation

**Topic:** Alcohol Guidelines

**Type of Question:** Written Question on Notice

**Senator:** Leyonhjelm, David

**Question:**

Would representation of alcohol consumers provide information on alcohol consumption relevant in the preparation of guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol? Would such representation provide information on the benefits of alcohol drinking that would provide useful context in the preparation of the guidelines? Would such representation also help ensure that positions expressed by health experts on the committee are tested, or are such positions impervious to bias?

**Answer:**

The review of the *Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol* (2009) (the Alcohol Guidelines) is informed by a systematic and robust evaluation of the most current published scientific evidence examining the health benefits and harms of drinking alcohol. The evidence identified is appraised and translated into recommendations using international best practice in guideline development.

Robust information on the consumption of alcohol across Australia is sought from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare which conducts the National Drug Strategy Household Survey. It has been conducted every two to three years since 1985, with the most recent survey undertaken in 2016.

The National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) guideline development process has a number of measures in place to ensure that no single individual is able to unduly influence the outcomes of any work it undertakes. This includes evaluation of the evidence by an independent contractor, methodological review of the evidence evaluation and expert review of the draft guidelines. The final guideline is only released by the Chief Executive Officer once Council of NHMRC is satisfied that all NHMRC processes have been duly followed.

To ensure the Alcohol Guidelines address the concerns of the Australian community in regards to the health benefits and harms of alcohol consumption, NHMRC conducted a call for evidence in December 2016-January 2017. This evidence will be considered as part of the guideline development process. Public consultation will also be conducted on the draft guidelines, with feedback considered before the guidelines are finalised.