



WORKING TO BUILD A HEALTHY AUSTRALIA  
[www.nhmrc.gov.au](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au)

Mr Elton Humphery  
Committee Secretary  
Community Affairs Committee  
PARLIAMENT HOUSE  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Humphery,

### **Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill 2007**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill 2007.

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is Australia's peak body for supporting health and medical research; for developing health advice for the Australian community, health professionals and governments; and for providing advice on ethical behaviour in health care and in the conduct of health and medical research.

The 2001 NHMRC *Australian alcohol guidelines: health risks and benefits* (the current guidelines) were written to provide Australians with knowledge and understanding that would enable them to enjoy alcohol, if they choose to drink, while minimising harmful consequences. In the guidelines, the NHMRC advises that people who drink regularly at high levels place themselves at increased risk of chronic ill health and premature death, and that an episode of heavy drinking places the drinker and others at risk of injury and death.

#### Attachment A

These guidelines are currently being reviewed by the NHMRC to reflect new evidence regarding the health effects of alcohol. The approach in revising the guidelines, now titled the *Australian alcohol guidelines for low-risk drinking* (the revised guidelines), was to show the level of lifetime risk of injury and chronic-disease associated with drinking alcohol. This new approach has led to a proposed guideline for "low-risk drinking" that is lower than the levels recommended in the 2001 edition. The revised guidelines continue to advise that drinking at higher levels is associated with increased risks of alcohol-related accidents, injuries, disease and death.

A draft of the revised guidelines was released for public consultation between October and December 2007 Attachment B. These draft guidelines provide an overarching guideline of two standard drinks or less for men and women in any one day for low risk of both immediate and long term harm from drinking. This guideline also covers young adults from 18-25 years of age. The draft guidelines also have a specific guideline for young people under 18 years of age stating that not drinking is the safest option. This proposed guideline is based on evidence about developmental damage and long term harm to young people as a result of alcohol consumption.

Further, the guidelines provide a specific guideline for women who are pregnant, planning a pregnancy or may become pregnant, and for women who are breastfeeding. In each of these cases, women are advised that not drinking is the safest option. Due to limitations in the available evidence, it has not been possible to set a "safe" or "no-risk" drinking level to avoid harm to a fetus or infant.

The NHMRC guidelines are intended to provide a resource for a range of groups including health professionals, community groups, industry, professional organisations, schools and educational organisations. They will also inform policy makers, planners, decision makers, and those responsible for providing alcohol, who have a broader responsibility to the community and whose decisions may influence the health of communities.

The NHMRC would be pleased to meet with the Committee to provide more detailed information. Please contact Mrs Cathy Clutton, Executive Director of the Health Evidence and Advice Branch, on 02 6217 9030 or by e-mail at [cathy.clutton@nhmrc.gov.au](mailto:cathy.clutton@nhmrc.gov.au) if you would like to follow up our submission.

Yours sincerely

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

Professor Warwick Anderson  
Chief Executive Officer

10 March 2008