

3 June 2021

Hon Kris Faafoi
Minister of Justice
Parliament Buildings
PO Box 18 888
Wellington 6130

By email: k.faafoi@ministers.govt.nz

Dear Minister

The NZMA is New Zealand's largest medical organisation, with about 5,000 members from all areas of medicine. The NZMA aims to provide leadership of the medical profession, and to promote professional unity and values, and the health of all New Zealanders.

In recent days, there has been media coverage of the damage alcohol causes to many New Zealanders, and the strain and difficulties medical staff face in dealing with alcohol-related harm.

Reports of the widespread harm alcohol causes to thousands of people may be news to many New Zealanders. Sadly, it is not news to us.

Alcohol is not only an intoxicant, but a toxin that has direct and indirect health effects, and an addictive psychotropic drug.

The facts are clear:

- The deaths of around 800 people – at least – die each year can be attributed to alcohol
- Māori and Pacific peoples are at increased risk of alcohol-related harm
- Even low-level alcohol use increases the risk of a range of cancers, and heavy drinking increases the risk of heart disease
- The cost to our country is immense – a study estimated that harmful alcohol use in 2005-2006 cost New Zealand approximately \$4.4 billion of diverted resources and lost welfare. That figure is likely to have increased
- Alcohol is involved in 31-46% of all criminal offences, and nearly half of all homicides
- An estimated 600 to 3000 babies are born each year with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum disorder
- Alcohol is a factor in 62,000 physical assaults a year, 10 sexual assaults, and 28% of all road traffic injuries
- One in four drinkers in New Zealand is classified as a hazardous drinker

- People who already live in deprived areas are more likely to have hazardous drinking patterns
- One in three people aged 12 to 16 engage in binge drinking, and children often experience harm as a result of heavy drinking by others

While the harmful effects of alcohol are felt by everyone, New Zealanders most vulnerable and in need of support often take the brunt.

Medical professionals must regularly deal with intoxicated patients who pose a risk to medical staff through abusive aggressive behaviour, disrupt hospital and emergency care and deprive others of much-needed medical attention.

Clearly, current legislation and regulations are failing to keep New Zealanders safe.

We strongly and urgently ask you to review the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act to address the damage alcohol causes to our community.

[Our 2015 report](#) “Reducing Alcohol-related Harm” is a comprehensive study into the effects of alcohol in New Zealand.

It also sets out a suite of recommendations that we put forward as part of a comprehensive approach to reducing alcohol-related harm.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this important matter at your earliest convenience.

Alcohol has a long-standing place in our history and culture. It is enjoyed safely by many. However there is no doubt that alcohol has contributed to the death or ill-health of generations of New Zealanders.

Now is the time to act, to support and safeguard this and future generations.

Yours sincerely

Dr Alistair Humphrey
NZMA Chair