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24 June 2011

Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters  
Department of House of Representatives  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

To the Secretary of the Committee,

**Submission to the Inquiry into the funding of political parties and election campaigns**

The McCusker Centre for Action on Alcohol and Youth (MCAAY) is an independent organisation committed to reducing harms from alcohol among young people.

Cancer Council WA is an independent not-for-profit organisation that conducts research, cancer prevention and support programs, and advocacy in order to reduce the burden of cancer on the community. Cancer Council WA is concerned about the level of alcohol consumption in Australia due to the role alcohol consumption plays in increasing people's risks of developing certain cancers.

MCAAY and Cancer Council WA welcome the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry into the funding of political parties and election campaigns. We are particularly concerned about political donations from members of the liquor industry and groups with alcohol-related interests.

The health and social costs of alcohol in Australia are of great concern. The cost of harms caused by alcohol misuse in Australia is estimated at \$36 billion annually<sup>1</sup>. Alcohol consumption causes over 5,000 deaths and 80,000 hospitalisations in Australia every year<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Laslett, A-M., Catalano, P., Chikritzhs, Y., Dale, C., Doran, C., Ferris, J., Jainullabudeen, T., Livingston, M, Matthews, S., Mugavin, J., Room, R., Schlotterlein, M. and Wilkinson, C. (2010) *The Range and Magnitude of Alcohol's Harm to Others*. Fitzroy, Victoria: AER Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre, Eastern Health.

Young people and alcohol are of special concern. In Australia, there is a growing culture of young people drinking to get drunk. Around 80% of the alcohol consumed by people aged 14 to 24 years is consumed in ways that put the drinker's (and others') health at risk of acute harm, including from falls, assaults, road crashes and burns<sup>2</sup>. On average, five Australians aged under 25 years die from injury and disease caused by hazardous drinking in a week<sup>3</sup>. There is also significant and growing cause for concern about longer-term harms from drinking associated with brain development<sup>4</sup>.

Alcohol is also a known risk factor for cancer, including cancers of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus, breast, colorectum and liver. It is estimated that 5,070 cases of cancer (or 5% of all cancers) are attributable to long-term, chronic use of alcohol each year in Australia.<sup>5</sup>

There is currently considerable policy discussion at both national and state levels in Australia on alcohol issues and the approaches governments should take to reduce alcohol-related harm. It is imperative that the debate is not influenced by companies with vested interests in increasing alcohol consumption.

The public may consider political parties that are supported by donations from alcohol interests to bear an expectation of support for the alcohol lobby's agenda.

We therefore recommend that:

- \* The public should have timely access to complete information about all donations at any level to political parties and election campaigns;
- \* The current financial disclosure regulations should be amended to require the full disclosure of all political donations, both direct and indirect, irrespective of the amount;
- \* Legislation should be introduced prohibiting direct and indirect political donations from alcohol industry organisations and groups with significant alcohol-related interests.

Thank you for considering our submission.

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<sup>2</sup> Chikritzhs T, Catalano P, Stockwell T, Donath S, Ngo H, Young D, et al. Australian alcohol indicators, 1990-2001: Patterns of alcohol use and related harms for Australian states and territories. Perth: National Drug Research Institute and Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre Inc; 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Chikritzhs TN, Pascal R. Trends in Youth Alcohol Consumption and Related Harms in Australian Jurisdictions, 1990–2002. Bulletin No. 6. Perth, Western Australia: National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University of Technology; 2004.

<sup>4</sup> National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol. 2009, National Health and Medical Research Council: Canberra.

<sup>5</sup> Cancer Council Australia Position Statement: Alcohol and Cancer Risk. Available at:

[http://www.cancer.org.au/File/PolicyPublications/Position\\_statements/CCA\\_Alcohol\\_and\\_cancer\\_position\\_statement\\_final\\_May11.pdf](http://www.cancer.org.au/File/PolicyPublications/Position_statements/CCA_Alcohol_and_cancer_position_statement_final_May11.pdf)

Yours sincerely,

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Susan Rooney  
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