

**Dr Raymond Seidler FACHAM [RACP}**

**Addiction Medicine**

Suite 1, 13 Springfield Avenue,

Kings Cross NSW 2011

Provider No 447512L

Ph: 9358 3066 Fax: 9383676

e mail: [rseidler@ozemail.com.au](mailto:rseidler@ozemail.com.au)

Dear Sir or madam,

I am a specialist in addiction medicine practising in Kings Cross NSW. In addition, I am also the secretary of the Eastern Sydney Division of General Practice and regularly present on drug and alcohol issues to medical and lay audiences.

Recently, our division of general practice hosted a youth Forum for all the high schools in our area. Attendees included a 75 students from variety of private and public schools. My presentation was on intoxication and the subject of premixed alcopops came up in discussion. The consensus of opinion amongst the young people was that raising the excise on premixed drinks would do nothing to reduce the level of binge drinking amongst their cohort. Many of the young women said they would just resort to cheap drinks or buy their own spirits, and at the same time purchase a bottle of soft drink to mix with either vodka, bourbon or whisky. They also explained to me and to their teachers that they would seek out cheaper alcohol alternatives like wine in casks which they explain could be procured for around \$10 for 4 Litres

It is my contention that increasing the price of such premixed drinks will reduce their availability and desirability but do little to reduce the level of binge drinking in young people. Traditionally, punitive techniques on the supply side of the equation have been spectacularly unsuccessful while there are cheaper alternatives available. If heroin is taken as an example, since 2002 it has become much more expensive for users as a result of reduced supply. Many users have resorted to alternative, cheaper drugs like crystal methamphetamine, with devastating effects.

Alcohol has pervaded Australian society completely, with approximately 10% of the adult population drinking hazardously. Treatment programs are at best uncoordinated and unresponsive to community needs with poor funding and a focus on abstinence-based regimes.

The issue of hazardous binge drinking amongst young people has yet to be addressed in a coordinated national programme. If we take Newcastle New South Wales as an example, the inner city environment has become a no-go area for older residents on three nights of the week as a result of extraordinary indiscriminate violence perpetrated by young alcohol fuelled population that descends on the area over the weekend.

In my own area of Kings Cross, there is clear evidence of mayhem on the streets every Friday and Saturday night with older people holed up in their flats unable to sleep and terrified to go down to street level where antisocial behaviour has reached epidemic levels.

Today in Australia, young people can earn more money than before and have more leisure time. This combined with a propensity to drink at hazardous levels has fuelled unprecedented disintegration in the places where they choose to meet and socialise.

Raising the price of alcopops seems to have the hallmarks of knee-jerk reaction. It has all the appeal of a simple answer to a complex question. Until we address the underlying issues of alcohol dependence in Australia generally and in young people in particular, we are doomed to repeat our mistakes. And to say that this is an Australian phenomenon only is to fly in the face of international reality. We have it seems, an epidemic worldwide of binge drinking in young people. Even countries which previously have controlled their drinking through cultural mores which demand better behaviour, seem to have been swept up in this tsunami.

I believe that even if we banned alcohol altogether for sale to people under the age of 21, we would still have a problem. The issue cannot be addressed on the supply side only. A concerted national campaign with zero tolerance of alcohol fuelled misbehaviour combined with a national treatment programme funded by the liquor industry and government seemed to me the only viable solution to a difficult and seemingly insurmountable problem that defies punitive legislative changes the way bootleggers defied prohibition in the United States during the 1920s.

Yours sincerely,  
Dr Raymond Seidler