

ALCOHOL TOLL BILL 2008 SUBMISSION

INTRODUCTION:

I am a mother of 4 teenagers and a registered Emergency Department nurse. Over the last few years I have witnessed a very disturbing trend in our drinking culture.

My concerns lie with our younger generation and the culture of binge drinking that has extended into the private party environment. As a mother who is well aware of the potential dangers of alcohol, I set out on a campaign to create awareness to teenagers and their parents. My focus was primarily on legislation to prevent the secondary supply of alcohol to minors- a problem that is in epidemic proportions and is creating a growing culture of binge drinking among our teenagers today. I currently take an active role in various alcohol committees including:

- + Geelong Drug Action Working Party**
- + Barwon Regional Drug and Alcohol Alliance**
- + Geelong police – Barwon Safe party**
- + School Drug ED and convening a forum for parents and students**
- + Close networks with Australian Drug foundation- CAAN and CEO ARBIAS**

The problems associated with alcohol are widespread and are caused by a number of factors. The biggest obstacle we face is cracking the hard core of acceptance of alcohol that has embedded so deeply into our society over the years. What we are witnessing in our society now is the effects of a problem that has previously been under a cloud of denial. This has enabled the progression of a drinking culture that threatens our well being. This phenomenon is not dissimilar to our water and global warming crisis in that we have turned a blind eye to the problems that are so obviously staring us in the face. It will take some courageous leadership to put the swing in motion, because no one likes change.

The announcement by our government to address our countries alcohol problems is a huge step in creating a safer and prosperous country. The silent majority will be relieved and very grateful. For the rest, it will unfortunately be just an inconvenient truth. With enthusiasm and pleasure I submit my views and arguments to the Senate enquiry on the recently introduced parliamentary bill to reduce our alcohol toll.

Discussion of main objects of the Alcohol Toll Bill

a) Limit times of alcohol advertising:

Advertising is used as a powerful tool for promoting mass public interest and awareness. Restricting the hours that advertising is broadcast could essentially minimise the impact of alcohols acceptability across the nation. Adults and children alike would benefit as has been shown in the past with stringent changes that were made with tobacco advertising.

It is well recognised by psychologists that advertising can work on the conscious and unconscious mind and imprints its messages with absolute accuracy.

The message that is bombarding our society through advertising is creating a confusing picture for adults and children. If alcohol is really causing all this damage then why is it continually glorified in the media.

The ultimate goal would be to restrict advertising to an absolute minimum. The huge cost economically and socially of alcohol on our country is a great concern and should drown out any complaint made by our broadcasting giants.

b) Compulsory health education labels for alcohol products:

This area shows up as one of the most legitimate areas of neglect by our government. On one hand we have a beverage that is classed as a drug due to its mind altering properties, yet it is classified under the Food standards of Australia New Zealand and sits quite comfortably in the guidelines between baby formula and other foods and beverages. The Australian government handed over most its control surrounding food and beverage guidelines by negotiating an inter-government agreement in 2004 with the NZ food council, who now oversee the majority of our food standards including alcohol.

The ANZFC has an impressive list of board and fellow members whose qualifications are exceptional in food related areas, but incredibly none have any experience or expertise on alcohol and its potentially devastating effects.

This is a gross oversight by our government in terms of overseeing guidelines and recommendations for a drug that is causing Australia widespread harm. Clearly an urgent addressing is needed to ensure that the Australian government has more input into this important area and ensures that the ANZFC council has some board members with expertise and knowledge regarding alcohol.

Helen Torpy
18th March 2008

Compulsory health warning labels on alcohol are absolutely vital in addressing our binge drinking culture. I spend much time in my campaigning talking to teenagers and adults including convening forums and community activities on this issue.

There is only one conclusion I can make....Most people are not educated about the effects of alcohol or just don't believe it. There is something very powerful and convincing when information is actually in writing, especially when it is written clearly on the container they are drinking from.

The most vulnerable are our young people, who sadly just don't understand the warning we are trying to convey. Our young 'Y' generation are smart, savvy and they value their intelligence. This is our biggest 'trump card' in the battle of teenage binge drinking.

Organizations such as ARBIAS (Alcohol related brain injury Australian services), believe that we are raising a generation of brain impaired kids. They describe the effects of binge drinking as similar to being repeatedly punched in the head .Every time a child binge drinks is the same as being punch drunk. The effects are insidious, effecting emotions, thinking, reasoning and leaving some with serious physical deficits. These children will one day be our doctors, teachers and even our politicians and they have the right to be warned about these risks to their health and well-being.

c) Establishing an alcohol advertising council.

An overhaul of the current system of approvement of alcohol advertising is long overdue. Currently there is vested interest by alcohol companies to allow advertising which encourages our drinking culture and lures our children into the misconception that alcohol has all the answers for a fulfilling life.

We wouldn't leave our fast food giants in charge of food advertising standards and similar should apply for alcohol advertising. The establishment of a 'Responsible Alcohol Advertising Division' under the banner of the Australian Communication and Media will certainly maintain safe and unbiased alcohol advertising.

Yours Sincerely

Helen Torpy