



## Council of Presidents of Medical Colleges

### Position Statement

#### Reducing Alcohol Harm in the Australian Community 2019

The Council of Presidents of Medical Colleges (CPMC) is the peak body for specialist medicine in Australia. CPMC member organisations educate and train Australia's doctors into specialists. Our vision is to improve, protect and promote the health of the Australian public.

To address the rising rate of harm caused by alcohol, CPMC is calling on government to release the national treatment framework for alcohol.

##### **Background to Alcohol harm in Australia**

- Every year in Australia there are nearly 6,000 alcohol-related deaths and 144,000 alcohol-related hospitalisations.<sup>1</sup>
- National rates of alcohol-attributable deaths and alcohol-attributable hospitalisations have remained relatively stable over time.<sup>2</sup>
- Alcohol-related emergency department presentations have remained stable or slightly increased over time.<sup>3</sup>

##### **The Cost of Alcohol Harm to Australian Society**

The annual cost of alcohol misuse to Australia was estimated to be \$9.2 billion in 2010. This includes only the more direct and measurable costs (many of which are borne by government) such as healthcare, treatment and prevention, criminal justice system, property damage, traffic accident damage, and productivity losses.<sup>4</sup>

While there is limited data currently available on the incidence of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD) in Australia, the incidence of diagnosis is increasing. FASD is a hidden cost to productivity, health and wellbeing which is likely to increase into the future. It has significant societal and budgetary implications. These include adverse impacts on cognition, increased rates of juvenile incarceration and increased need for long term residential care and support for a younger population.

In a separate estimate also in 2010, the annual cost of alcohol harm to Australia was estimated to be \$36 billion. This estimate includes direct and measurable costs such as healthcare, crime and child protection, but also accounts for alcohol's harm to third parties, by incorporating the value people place on pain, suffering and loss of life caused by alcohol.<sup>5</sup>

##### **Absence of a National Alcohol Strategy for Australia**

Australia has not had a national alcohol strategy since the 2005 strategy lapsed in 2011. The Government did produce a draft national alcohol strategy in late 2017 and that work is underway as part of the National Drug Strategy to develop a treatment framework for alcohol.

There is a unified desire among medical and public health bodies to see the adoption of an effective national alcohol strategy to guide Australia in its efforts to stop alcohol harm.

The World Health Organisation's (WHO) Framework for Alcohol Control has developed a non-binding framework to support alcohol control. The [Global Strategy to Reduce Harmful Use of Alcohol](#) was endorsed by the 63<sup>rd</sup> World Health Assembly in 2010. It recommends "establishing a system for specific domestic taxation on alcohol accompanied by an effective enforcement system".

The [Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs 2013–2020](#) (2013) was endorsed by the 66th World Health Assembly. This followed on from commitments made by Heads of State and Government in the [United Nations Political Declaration on the Prevention and Control of NCDs](#) (2011), recognizing the primary role and responsibility of governments in responding to the challenge of non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

[‘Best buys’ and other recommended interventions for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases](#) is the key document. This is appendix 3 from the Global Action Plan but updated in 2017 with the latest evidence. It provides policymakers with a list of cost-effective, recommended interventions to tackle NCDs. The updated Appendix 3 was endorsed in May 2017 by the Seventieth World Health Assembly.

It lists 88 interventions, 16 of which are identified as 'best buys' because they are considered the most cost-effective and feasible for implementation. The best buys for alcohol control are:

- Increase excise taxes on alcoholic beverages;
- Enact and enforce bans or comprehensive restrictions on exposure to alcohol advertising; and
- Enact and enforce restrictions on the physical availability of retailed alcohol.

### Recommendations

CPMC recommends the Australian Government releases the national alcohol strategy that sets out a clear plan to reduce morbidity and mortality due to alcohol misuse as a matter of urgency, free from influence by the alcohol industry and its representatives. As part of the policy development process, CPMC recommends the Australian government supports the efforts by the National Alliance for Action on Alcohol (NAAA) in its efforts to tackle short- and long-term alcohol harm.

### References

---

<sup>1</sup> Lensvelt, E., Gilmore, W., Liang, W., Sherk, A. and Chikritzhs, T. (2018). *Estimated alcohol-attributable deaths and hospitalisations in Australia 2004 to 2015. National Alcohol Indicators, Bulletin 16*. Perth: National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University. Retrieved 14/12/2018 from: <http://ndri.curtin.edu.au/NDRI/media/documents/naip/naip016.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Lensvelt, E., Gilmore, W., Gordon, E., Hobday, M., Liang, W. and Chikritzhs, T. (2015). *Trends in estimated alcohol-related emergency department presentations in Australia, 2005-06 to 2011-12*. National Alcohol Indicators Project, Bulletin 14. Perth: National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University. Retrieved 19/07/2018 from: <http://ndri.curtin.edu.au/NDRI/media/documents/naip/naip014.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Cnossen, S. (2010). "Excise taxation in Australia" in *Melbourne Institute – Australia's Future Tax and Transfer Policy Conference (full report)*. Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research. Retrieved 06/05/2019 from: [http://taxreview.treasury.gov.au/content/html/conference/downloads/AFTS\\_Tax\\_and\\_Transfer\\_Policy\\_Conference.pdf](http://taxreview.treasury.gov.au/content/html/conference/downloads/AFTS_Tax_and_Transfer_Policy_Conference.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (2010). *About Alcohol's \$36 billion cost*. Retrieved 06/05/2019 from: <http://fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/36-Billion.pdf>

**Contact: Ms Angela Magarry Chief Executive**