



Public Health Association
of New Zealand
**Kāhui Hauora Tumatānui
o Aotearoa**

Alcohol Harm Reduction Policy Statement

The Public Health Association of New Zealand (PHA-NZ) is a national association with members from the public, private and voluntary sectors. Our organisation's vision is 'Good health for all - health equity in Aotearoa', or 'Hauora mō te katoa – oranga mō te Ao', and our purpose is to advocate for the health of all New Zealanders. The Public Health Association of New Zealand calls for significant reform of alcohol legislation in Aotearoa New Zealand. We urge the government to undertake evidence-based regulatory reform that focuses on the prevention of harm, reducing inequities, and prioritising the health and wellbeing of people and communities.

Introduction

Alcohol is the most used drug in Aotearoa New Zealand and is a significant public health issue. In 2021/22, four in every five adults (79.5%) reported having consumed alcohol in the last 12 months, which was an increase from 2020 levels (78.5%) (1). Nearly one in five adults drink alcohol to hazardous levels (2). In Aotearoa New Zealand, alcohol is cheap (3), readily accessible, and widely marketed (4). This has contributed to a significant drinking culture.

It is important to note that this statement should be read in conjunction with the [PHA-NZ position statement on alcohol sports sponsorship](#). Further, policy statements on gambling and tobacco harm are influenced by similar social and commercial determinants of health and are considered aligned.

Evidence of alcohol-related harm

Alcohol is associated with a diverse range of health and psychological harms to those who use it. This includes, but is not limited to, cancer, dementia, suicide, major depression, injury, and liver disease (5). For this reason, the World Health Organisation (WHO) affirms that there is no safe level of alcohol consumption (6). Although several countries, including New Zealand, use low-risk consumption guidelines, these are likely to come under review as new evidence of harm emerges.

In New Zealand, it was estimated in 2007 that alcohol use was associated with 13,769 years of healthy life lost, with 5.4% of all deaths in those under 80 attributable to alcohol (7). Alcohol use is also directly associated with harm to others, including but not limited to issues such as foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (8), interpersonal violence (9), and productivity loss (10). In total, it has been estimated that the annual cost of alcohol to New Zealand society is \$7.8 billion (11), which

significantly exceeds government revenue from excise taxes. Alcohol is considered the most harmful drug in New Zealand (12). Of note, the 2007 DALY (Disability-Adjusted Life Year) figures are the most up to date for alcohol costs to New Zealand. It would be valuable to have updated estimates.

Alcohol-related harm to Māori

Māori experience significant inequities in health and social settings arising from alcohol, which the Crown has both contributed to and failed to address (13). The Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012 does not give effect to Te Tiriti (14). Tiriti-informed alcohol legislation must empower Māori to participate and be autonomous in the decision-making process about alcohol in the communities (14). This should be as co-designers of policy that aims to facilitate equitable health and social outcomes for Māori (14), with the self-determination promised under Tiriti Article 2. This includes participating as Māori using Māori concepts.

Two decades ago, Durie (2001) noted that achieving change requires more than isolated measures or excluding Māori; it necessitates a broad approach that encompasses Māori development principles and strategic direction (15). The latest New Zealand Health Strategy (2023) aims to establish links between individual, community, and environmental well-being (Mauri Ora, Whānau Ora, Wai Ora), providing insights across different sectors to contribute to overall health outcomes (16)

Alcohol policies in New Zealand have had significant effects on the Māori population, and these effects have often been a cause for concern. Historically, alcohol has had a disproportionate impact on Māori communities, contributing to a range of social and health issues, including higher rates of alcohol-related harm, addiction, violence, and poor health outcomes. New government policies related to the sale and consumption of alcohol can either exacerbate or mitigate these issues.

Efforts have been made to address alcohol-related harm within the Māori community through policies aimed at reducing alcohol availability, restricting advertising, and promoting responsible drinking. Some of these policies have shown promise in curbing excessive alcohol consumption, particularly among young Māori. However, there remains a need for culturally sensitive and community-driven approaches that consider the unique challenges faced by Māori, such as the historical trauma associated with colonisation and the importance of tikanga Māori in addressing alcohol-related issues. Collaborative efforts involving Māori leadership and organisations alongside government agencies, are crucial to developing effective policies that improve the well-being of Māori communities while respecting their cultural values and autonomy.

Prior reviews

Evidence-based reviews of the health and social effects of alcohol and current alcohol policy in New Zealand have successively highlighted that legislative change is required and provided key policy actions that need to be taken. To date, there has been very little responsiveness from the government on these recommendations. This includes reports such as:

- 2010 – New Zealand law commission report “Alcohol in our Lives: Curbing the Harm” (17)
- 2014 – Ministerial Forum on Alcohol Advertising and Sponsorship (18)
- 2014 – Ministry of Justice report on the effectiveness alcohol pricing policies (19)
- 2018 – He Ara Oranga: Report of the Government Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction (20)

There is community support for alcohol law reform (21); however, communities are currently disempowered from participating in licensing processes at the local level (22). The Ministry of Justice has however made significant progress with the introduction in 2023 of the Supplementary Analysis Report: Sale and Supply of Alcohol (Community Participation) Amendment Bill (23). The proposed changes to the alcohol licensing process will improve communities' ability to influence alcohol regulation in their area, through who can object to licence applications, how licensing hearings are run and the ability to adopt and apply local alcohol policies (LAPs) (23).

Priorities for action

The Public Health Association of New Zealand acknowledges the progress made and recommends that the Government of Aotearoa New Zealand:

- Undertake a substantial and thorough review of the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012 and commit to actioning the recommendations, including, but not limited to
 - Giving effect to Te Tiriti in alcohol legislation, including through actions previously recommended in the report Te Tiriti o Waitangi and alcohol law (14), such as:
 - Incorporating a Tiriti clause in the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act with direction on how it can be given practical effect
 - Requiring Mana Whenua to be co-designers in local alcohol policies
 - Enabling local Māori to be represented on any licensing decision-making body
 - Incorporating an explicit 'equity' provision as an object or principle of the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act
 - Increasing the price of alcohol by 50%, in line with recent recommendations (24) through methods such as minimum unit pricing or increasing excise tax; additional revenue to be used to design and deliver harm minimisation measures and promote equity
 - Reducing outlet density from 63 to five outlets per 100,000 people (ref)
 - Available hours reductions from 112 to 50 hours per week
 - Enact and enforce a complete ban on alcohol marketing (including physical and digital) and ending alcohol sports sponsorship
 - Enact and enforce restrictions on the availability of alcohol via methods such as reduced alcohol outlet density, reduced hours of sale, and reduced access to on-demand (rapid) alcohol delivery
 - Enforcing higher license fees for monitoring premises and the use of penalties for breaches
 - Empowering communities to participate in alcohol-related decisions at a local level
- Undertake research to determine updated estimates of the cost of alcohol-related harm to New Zealand
- Design and implement alcohol policy interventions based on the social determinants of health, with an understanding of coping motivations as a determinant of alcohol use and harm (25)
- Support consumers to understand the current evidence-based advice on alcohol consumption to inform their decision-making; this would include advice for specific groups such as youth and pregnant people
- Improve monitoring and reporting on the effectiveness of alcohol policies, including impacts on health equity, health and social harms, and harm to others

The Public Health Association of New Zealand recommends that local governments of Aotearoa New Zealand should:

- Develop and implement Local Alcohol Policies based on local community need
- Put in place more restrictive local alcohol policies in sensitive areas
- Consider means of making food more available and accessible at licensed premises

PHA-NZ actions to support this policy

The Public Health Association of New Zealand, including its branches, will:

- Advocate for evidence-based alcohol policies that prioritise the health and well-being of people and communities, using up-to-date and independent resources such as the World Health Organisation ‘best buys’ (26)
- Influence national and local government policy-making through submissions and participation in policy development forums
- Strengthen relationships with aligned advocacy groups (including but not limited to Alcohol Healthwatch, Alcohol Action NZ, and the Health Coalition Aotearoa), policy officials, and decision makers at local and national levels
- Encourage members to undertake research to fill data gaps
- Keep members informed of relevant research, key policy and/or legislative developments, and consultation opportunities.

Public Health Association of New Zealand

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Policy Sponsor(s)	
Peer reviewed by	
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Date to be reviewed	

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