Australasian Therapeutic Communities Conference

THE GREAT ALCOHOL DEBATE
WHY DO WE NEED TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT ALCOHOL?

Misuse of alcohol is a major preventable risk factor for a wide range of diseases and injuries including:

- Certain cancers
- Cardiovascular disease
- Liver cirrhosis
- Alcohol dependence
- Motor vehicle accidents
- Educational problems in young people
- Drowning
- Suicide
- Violence

$15.3b Social Costs 2004 -05
In the Western Pacific Region, alcohol-related harm accounts for 5.5% of the burden of disease, this is higher than the global average of 4%.
Epidemiological evidence suggests that by the age of 20, alcohol accounts for 28% of total harm in males.
2007 Household Survey

• 2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey conducted between July and November 2007 (n=<23,000)

• Almost 30% of 12-15 year olds drank alcohol in 2007.

• 1 in every 4 of those aged 14 – 19 had a binge drinking session at least once a month for the last 12 months.

• April 07 AIHW media release stated that 'The proportion was higher among females (28.3%) than males (24.5%).
Deaths – alcohol & young people

• The *Trends in Child Deaths in NSW 1996 – 2005* study from the NSW Child Death Review Team reported on 145 deaths over 10 years.

• Found that in the decade, the risk for 14 to 15 year olds rose dramatically (up 152%).

• The risk for girls up by 37% but down by 17% for boys.

• “The increase in alcohol-related deaths for females and the decline for males….may result from several factors, including the introduction of alcopops, first sold in Australia in 1995, which particularly target females”.
An obvious cause of harm....however.....

......Alcohol is a legal product
......that many people enjoy
......which also plays a significant role in the Australian economy, generating:

» Substantial employment
» Retail activity
» Export income
» Tax revenue.
HENCE, we have the Great Debate about Alcohol.

Great Debate Issue 1: Taxation
What is the proposed change to tax on alcopops?

- Alcopop tax rate was $39.36/L
- Straight spirit tax rate is $66.67/L
- Proposed change adjusts alcopop (premixed, RTD) tax rate to equivalent of that for spirits (senate yet to pass legislation).

- Represents a 70% increase in alcopop tax = overall cost increase *if* passed onto consumers by industry.
Alco-pops / RTDs and Market Share

• Trend towards greater consumption of RTDs:
  - In 2000, 18% of males and 22% of females drank pre-mixed spirits (RTDs) on last occasion of risky drinking (King et al, 2005)
  - In 2005, 51% of males and 78% of females drank pre-mixed spirits (RTDs) on last occasion of risky drinking (King et al, 2005)
Revenue from Alcohol

- Both government and industry receive revenue from adolescent drinking.

Industry
- In 2002 total non-tax revenue estimated at $104.7 million
- In 2005 total non-tax revenue estimated at $110.9 million
  - 6% increase ↑

Government
- In 2002 total tax revenue estimated at $112.1 million
- In 2005 total tax revenue estimated at $107.3 million
  - 4% decrease ↓
What should the tax rate be, and for which drinks?

Senate Inquiry into the RTD tax – recommended a review of taxation

Volumetric system – Has some issues.

Align public health goals with alcohol tax system?
Great Debate Topic 2 –

Binge Drinking Young People
Household Survey:

• One in five Australians aged 16-17 years drink alcohol at least weekly
  – 19-23% of adolescents binge drink in last week
    • Slight increase in young females
  – Binge is greater than 5 drinks on an occasion

• One in five do not drink alcohol
Brain Development

- Adolescence is a period of profound brain maturation not complete until about age 20.
- Does alcohol interfere with normal development?
Brain Development

- The back of brain matures first...
  - sensory and physical activities favoured over complex, cognitive-demanding activities
  - propensity toward risky, impulsive behaviors
  - poor planning and judgment

- The Prefrontal cortex is not fully developed until 20 years of age (judgement)

- The Amygdala dominates (reward rules)
↑ risk taking

↑ low effort - high excitement activities

↑ interest in novel stimuli

↓ planned thinking

↑ impulsiveness

PFC

amygdala
Young People

• Spirits are preferred by young drinkers

• Debate over drinking culture and modeling of behaviour by adults as causally important factors for adolescent drinking

• Supply of alcohol to young people and RSA important issues

• Marketing and product development (palatable to young people) is an important recent change

• ……advertising
Great Debate Topic 3 –
Advertising
Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code

• ABAC – self-regulating advertising code of the Australian alcohol beverages industry (1998) administered by a management committee which includes industry, advertising and government representatives.

• Advertising complaints are handled by the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Adjudication Panel. Costs borne by Industry.

• The Chief Adjudicator is Professor the Hon Michael Lavarch

• In 2006, the panel made 9 determinations; 7 complaints were dismissed and 2 upheld.
ABAC Code – key contents

– not have a strong or evident appeal to children or adolescents

– not challenge or dare people to drink or sample a particular alcohol beverage, other than low alcohol beverages, and must not contain any inducement to prefer an alcohol beverage because of its higher alcohol content
ABAC key contents cont’d

– not encourage consumption that is in excess of, or inconsistent with the NHMRC Australian Alcohol Guidelines

– not suggest that the consumption or presence of alcohol beverages may create or contribute to a significant change in mood or environment

• must not depict the consumption or presence of alcohol beverages as a cause of or contributing to the achievement of personal, business, social, sporting, sexual or other success
“Who is James Boag?”

JAMES·BOAG’S·PREMIUM

“Who is James Boag?”

JAMES·BOAG’S·PREMIUM
Withdrawn following complaints by the Community Alcohol Action Network & the Centre Against Sexual Assault 2004
PLAY HARD. STAY HARD.

Beer is bad for you, right? Wrong. With full strength, full flavour Carlton LJ, you can still have a great time and stay in shape. Thanks to longer brewing and specially selected aroma hops, Carlton LJ has all the strength and the taste you love in a real beer, yet 20% lower joules. Play hard. Stay hard. Live it up.
Great Debate Topic # 4

Availability
Is there a problem with availability?

- Supermarkets
- Bottle shops
- Licensed premises – restricted plus extended hours
- Discussion about the optimum number of licensed premises within geographic concentrations

- Attempts to restrict the number of liquor licences have been criticised as anti-competitive and against National Competition Policy

- Problems?
Bureau of Crime Statistics Research – NSW

• The more licensed premises there are in an area, the more likely are problems of drunkenness and property damage.

• Almost 25% of the respondents who lived within half a kilometre of the five closest licensed premises reported problems with drunkenness in their neighbourhood (compared with less than 10% living further than 1.6 kms away).

• Almost 36% of respondents who lived within half a kilometre of the five closest liquor outlets reported problems with property damage compared with 23% of those living further than 1.6 kms away.
Estimating the Short-term cost of police time spent dealing with alcohol related crime in NSW (2007)

- Neil Donnelly et al, NDLERF Report found:
  
  1. Alcohol related crime costs $50m in NSW police salary. The cost of alcohol-related crime could employ 1,000 extra constables
  
  2. Over 17% of NSW police time on a Friday or Saturday night is spent on alcohol-related crime, reducing alcohol-related crime would enable this time to be spent elsewhere
RSA – Responsible Service of Alcohol

• Almost 2,500 young people surveyed.

• Respondents who reported at least one sign of intoxication were asked how the licensed premises staff reacted to this.

• In 54% of cases the staff continued to serve them drinks (no change from 2002)

• On 2% of occasions they were asked to leave the premises, down from 4% in 2002.

YOUNG ADULTS’ EXPERIENCE OF RESPONSIBLE SERVICE PRACTICE IN NSW: AN UPDATE
Reducing the level of alcohol misuse is a shared responsibility

Federal government
- Leadership,
- Policy direction,
- Research and
- National campaigns.

State and Territory government
- Liquor licensing,
- Regulation
- Policing and
- Provision of services
Great Debate Topic # 5

What should we do about it?
Evidence?

- Australia has 3 National Research Centres

- NDARC’s work contributes to all 8 of the NDS Priority Areas, with three dominant areas:
  - Improved access to quality treatment;
  - Reducing drug use and related harms; and
  - Identification of, and response to, emerging trends
Brief Snapshot NDARC Alcohol Research

• AARC
• CLIMATE
• Secondary Supply of Alcohol to Minors

Other work of interest:
• Tastes & Perceptions Study – Copeland, et al
• Treatment and Treatment Outcome Studies – Mattick, Teesson, Copeland, etc.
• Cost-Effectiveness Study – Doran et al
• Alcohol and the adolescent brain – Teesson et al
Alcohol Action in Rural Communities – AARC

- Randomised controlled trial of matched rural communities

- Interventions designed with involvement of the community and using the evidence base to reduce alcohol related harm

- Measures of alcohol related harm will include criminal incidents, traffic accidents, hospital admissions, accident & emergency presentations

- Cost-benefit analysis will also be conducted to determine the outcomes of the community action approach.

Key contact: Dr Anthony Shakeshaft

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CLIMATE Schools

- Alcohol Module complete, psychostimulants & cannabis (in prep.)

- RCT with a 2 yr follow up

- Interactive, computer-driven lessons given as part of the Health/Phys Ed curriculum, Yr 8 students

- Cartoon ‘soapie’ where prevention strategies are given real-life contexts

- Alcohol module evaluated – excellent results

Key Contact –
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Climate Schools: Alcohol module

RCT with a 2 year follow up. Results showed that compared to controls, those who received CLIMATE Schools program had:

- Increases in alcohol knowledge
- Decreases in alcohol use
- Less alcohol related harms

Secondary Supply of Alcohol to Minors

(Catherine Deans, Laura Vogl, Maree Teesson, et al)

• Estimates are that between 37% and 52% of minors obtained alcohol from their parents the last time they drank.

• Conflicting information about laws pertaining to supply of alcohol to minors & (thus) a lack of educational material.

• Evidence unclear about causal relationship between parental supply & adolescent drinking problems (frequency of drinking vs harm/risky drinking one confounding issue).

• Advice to parents??
OK – besides building the evidence base for further interventions
...what other responses?
Key Questions:

1. What Prevention & Intervention Strategies Work?

2. Alcohol **pricing and taxation** (to reflect alcohol volume)

3. **Regulating the availability** of alcohol
   1. Examples: Raising the minimum purchasing age and/or enforcing current restrictions

4. Tougher **regulation of alcohol promotion**

5. Continued emphasis on **drink-driving** countermeasures

6. Modifying the **drinking environment**

7. Providing **accessible treatment & early intervention** services

Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity, Babor et al, 2003
It is not that we drink…. it is how we drink (patterns of drinking) and how much we drink (quantity).
Change Culture:

- Guidelines on appropriate drinking for adolescents
- Mass media campaigns promoting responsible drinking
- School based programs within a comprehensive plan
- Whole of community approaches, using evidence-based interventions, including sport

Target ‘intoxication’ – unacceptable and uncool

Smoking & drink driving – good examples that show culture change is possible.
Other options:

• Design taxation system for alcohol that is aligned with public health goals

• Incentives to encourage manufacturers to market mid-strength and low-strength products

• Restrictions on the availability of drinks with a high alcohol content (e.g. stop serving shots or double strength spirits after 10pm)
Coordinated Government Responses:

- National, State and Local government – discussing and trialling responses, for example:
  - ↑ Tax on RTD’s
  - Sporting and other community involvement
  - Lock-outs after 2.00 am
  - Non police liquor inspectors
  - Secondary supply legislation
  - Increase fees for late night opening venues
  - Plans for public education campaigns
Thank You

Acknowledgements to NDARC staff who have assisted with some of the slides in this presentation.