

**Submission
No 8**

PROVISION OF ALCOHOL TO MINORS

Organisation: Community Relations Commission
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Your Ref:
Our Ref:
File Ref:

The Committee Manager
Social Policy Committee
Parliament House
Macquarie St
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir / Madam

This submission has been prepared by the Community Relations Commission For a multicultural NSW. Members of the Multicultural Youth Network (MYN) and the Commission's Regional Advisory Councils were consulted in its development.

The *Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Act (2000)* recognises and values the different linguistic, religious, racial and ethnic backgrounds of residents of NSW, and promotes equal rights and responsibilities for all residents of NSW.

The Commission has responsibility for promoting community harmony, participation and access to services in order that the contribution of cultural diversity to NSW is celebrated and recognised as an important social and economic resource. It recognises multiculturalism as a deliberate public policy and takes proactive steps to ensure a cohesive and harmonious society.

The substance of this submission goes to 'whether there is broad community understanding of the rights and responsibilities of parents, guardians and responsible adults regarding the provision of alcohol to minors'. There are also social and cultural aspects to the consumption of alcohol which the inquiry should keep in mind.

It would appear that the law concerning the provision of alcohol to minors is *not* well understood in the community. This includes people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Should the Inquiry result in any legislative changes, or indeed, should it not, the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing (OLGR) will need to undertake a comprehensive, multi-faceted communication campaign to ensure *all* members of the community are aware of their rights and responsibilities.

As a NSW Government agency the OLGR is bound to implement the Principles of Multiculturalism, which include making provision for the culture, language and religion of others and ensuring individuals can access and participate in government programs and activities. In practice this means making particular, concerted efforts to communicate with certain sectors of the community. For example, young refugees settling in NSW, and other young migrants, have not been exposed to the preventative education messages that children growing up in Australia have. They are not considered 'health literate'. Similarly, their parents and guardians may also

have missed out on these messages and campaigns. This will include improving community understanding of the responsibilities of parents and guardians to educate children about alcohol and minimise their exposure to the irresponsible consumption of alcohol.

Education campaigns about the risks involved in alcohol consumption go hand in hand with increasing community knowledge of the law in regard to the purchase and consumption of alcohol and its provision to minors.

There is a need for greater research and evidence-based investment in prevention strategies for at risk communities generally, including emerging communities.

All contemporary cultures impose restrictions on what we may call ‘underage’ drinking. The definitions of ‘underage’ and the nature of the restrictions imposed vary significantly – from cultures in which it is socially acceptable to give small children diluted wine to those in which drinking while children are present is socially discouraged. These variations in ‘social norms’ occur despite increasing uniformity in external, legal definitions and controls and, it has been suggested reflect the different cultural beliefs about alcohol rather than different approaches to child-rearing.

While some cultures may be exposed to a greater prevalence of alcohol-related problems than others, moderate drinking which does not cause problems is the norm while extremes, excessive drinking or complete abstention, are abnormal behaviours. It is worth noting that there is also substantial variation in the manner in which people behave when they drink. In some societies, such as Australia, alcohol is associated with violent and anti-social behaviour while in others drinking behaviour is largely peaceful and harmonious. This variation is reportedly related to the different cultural beliefs about alcohol and social norms regarding comportment.

The development of policy and legislation on issues associated with alcohol has led to a plethora of research and publication on the subject, however, as mentioned above, there remains scope for further research in Australia. Much of the evidence points to the fact that societies with generally positive beliefs and expectations about alcohol experience fewer alcohol related problems. Australia does not currently fall into this category but the picture is complicated by the multicultural nature of our society. This is the challenge for policy makers and legislators in an area which is, at times, highly emotive. This, then, is the case for the maximum amount of genuine consultation with the entire community and tailoring subsequent communications strategies in a manner which reaches everyone.

Yours faithfully

Steffanie von Helle
Acting Chief Executive Officer