

**Submission  
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## **PROVISION OF ALCOHOL TO MINORS**

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# **Provision of Alcohol to Minors**

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## PREAMBLE<sup>1</sup>

The Federation of Parents and Citizens Association of New South Wales (P&C Federation) is committed to a free public education system which is open to all people, irrespective of culture, gender, academic ability and socio-economic class and empowers students to control their own lives and be contributing members of society.

This commitment is based on the belief that:

All students have the capacity to learn and the Government has prime responsibility to provide an education system open to all, which is free and secular. Schools should be structured to meet the needs of individual students and should respect the knowledge those students bring to school and build on that knowledge to foster their understanding about the world.

Parents as partners in the education process, have a right and a responsibility to play an active role in the education of their children.

P&C Federation and its representatives share a responsibility of ensuring representative decision making for the benefit of all students.

### **Introduction**

P&C Federation is thankful for this opportunity to submit our comments and feedback on the Inquiry into the Provision of Alcohol to Minors. P&C Federation strongly believes that as parents, carers and community members we have the primary responsibility for educating, informing and supporting our children. As first educators we are aware that education is much more than just learning at school in an academic manner. As parents, carers and community members we are aware that our actions have a real and direct impact on children, their behaviour and how they respond to the world they live in.

The expectations and guidelines we establish as parents and carers flow through to our children and shape the expectations they set themselves. The provision of alcohol to minors is complex when considering the diverse attitudes in community regarding the matter. However P&C Federation strongly believe that there is evidence of a negative impact on a young person's psychological and physical development caused by the consumption of alcohol. P&C Federation strongly advocates for communities to embrace an understanding of the needs of a minor to be able to develop and grow into a successful and contributing citizen. As such the need to protect minors, who by their very nature are vulnerable, should be considered as a priority and as the basis for any proposed legislative framework.

The National Health and Medical Research Council publication *Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol*<sup>2</sup> suggests that the safest option for those under the age of 18 is to not consume any alcohol; specifically those under the age of 15, who are at the highest risk of harmful effects if alcohol is consumed. It is suggested also that those in the age bracket 15-17 should also not consume alcohol in order to prevent any negative or harmful effects. The publication states that a number of harmful effects can occur if alcohol is

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<sup>1</sup> Preamble of Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW. 2010 P&C Handbook (6)

<sup>2</sup> The National Health and Medical Research Council publication *Australian Guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol* 2009.

consumed by a minor, research suggests that brain development can be impaired and the consumption of alcohol at a young age increases the likelihood of alcohol related problems later in life.

As representatives of the parents and citizen communities in New South Wales public schools members of our Organisation are aware of a number of issues other than the obvious medial factors. Some of the significant concerns communities have regarding the effects of alcohol consumption in minors include lowered inhibitions, increases in risky behaviour, violence, self-harm, adverse behavioural patterns and disengagement in educational circumstances. There are many instances where a young person in navigating through the often difficult stages of adolescences is not able to make choices in a rationale manner. Both scientifically and socially there would seem to be a wealth of evidence to show that alcohol consumption in minors is harmful. P&C Federation is yet to discover any resource, research paper or anecdotal experience where the provision of alcohol to minors has had a positive effect on a young developing mind.

P&C Federation would seek to have the provision for the supply of alcohol to minors removed from legislation. This prohibition would need to be coupled with educational promotions directed to both minors and communities. As well as legislating against the provision of alcohol to minors it is important to address the possibility that minors may seek to obtain alcohol via other unlawful means. Clearly defined definitions and guidelines are required to ensure that minors, whole communities and licenced establishments know that the provision of alcohol to minors is irresponsible and unlawful.

Throughout the discussion paper there is much conversation around responsible adult supervision and whether under responsible adult supervision the supply of alcohol to minors is safe. The issue with this discussion is that what is a consistent definition of responsible supervision? What are the parameters that can be guaranteed at a minimum to ensure that the situation in which a minor may be supplied alcohol and the manner, setting, amount and type of alcohol can be "safe"? Secondly, how successful will any education campaign be surrounding these guidelines where a whole family of community may themselves be vulnerable to poor choices where alcohol is concerned? It cannot be ignored and must be stated that it is sometimes also adults' not just minors who are exposed to alcohol where the impact is negative. To assume that all adults are armed with the required information or informed decision making processes necessary to 'responsibly' supply alcohol to minors is ridiculous not to mention unsatisfactory for ensuring the protection of the minor.

In raising the discussion of the provision or supply of alcohol to children all educational campaigns need to be accessible, comprehensible and relevant to communities and particularly young people. Information must be shared that not only outline the laws and their implications but also the reasoning behind the laws. Utilising real facts and figures as well as real stories and experiences to educate parents and carers to the risks of consumption of alcohol by minors is essential.

P&C Federation believe that in realising penalties to offenders under the law, there needs to be more than a fine and/or a 'slap on the wrist'. Our Organisation agrees with these offenders having to attend educational workshops as part of the penalties under the *Liquor Act 2007*. The legislations must act as a deterrent so that community witnesses a reduction in recidivism.

As an Organisation that advocates and works for the benefit and protection of children, P&C Federation strongly support measures to reduce the exposure of children to the harmful effects of alcohol. This is important in the both the child's home environment as well as in the greater community. Given the convincing evidence of harm presented in the discussion paper, P&C Federation would seek to protect children from consumption of alcohol before the age of 18 without concession.

P&C Federation acknowledges and welcomes the wider community involvement in the discussion regarding alcohol provision and minors and hopes that the government takes into account many of the key areas that concern parents, students and school communities. The ongoing social harm that is caused by alcohol consumption is a social discourse discussed every day in many mediums not the least being main stream media outlets and publications. P&C Federation supports communities being safe for the development of all peoples, especially minors. Our Organisation hopes the comments made in this submission are of assistance to the discussion.

P&C Federation look forward to witnessing positive results from this inquiry and welcome any further dialogue this may evoke.

