

**INQUIRY INTO STRATEGIES TO REDUCE ALCOHOL
ABUSE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN NSW**

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Inquiry into strategies to reduce alcohol abuse among young people in New South Wales

Camden Youth Council - Submission

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Brief Summary

Stereotypical societal paradigms regarding young people suggest that we are an apathetic generation who persistently engage in high risk activities predominantly inclusive of binge drinking and related alcohol abuse. This inquiry suggests otherwise as Camden Youth Council being eleven young people aged 15-25 collaborated to discuss, investigate and formulate valid arguments, opinions and reflective insights into the existing issue of alcohol abuse among young people in New South Wales. Camden Youth Council recognises and doesn't deny the prevailing incidence of alcohol abuse, however chooses to engage with governmental inquiries such as this in order to bridge the widening gap between State Governments and young people so as to collaboratively and effectively work toward proactive and sustainable preventative solutions of an innovative manner which reduce alcohol abuse among young people in New South Wales.

This submission investigates a multiplicity of controversial and debatable issues with regards to the effect of alcohol advertisements and promotions which reveals varying perspectives in terms of such advertisements being a central, predisposing factor toward shaping young people's perceptions in a sensationalised and indirect manner. Camden Youth Council delves into the psychological dimensions of alcohol abuse as a means of exploring the root causes through personal and societal factors which act as a motive and coping mechanism toward alcohol abuse. Further analysis was conducted with regards to the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code, Youth Solutions Campaign 'Celebrate Safe. No Regrets', the effectiveness of alcohol minimisation strategies in terms of drink- driving, the workplace, within and around licensed venues so as to reduce alcohol related violence, impacts upon the health system and the increased rates of susceptibility and vulnerability amongst certain groups of young people. This submission not only aims to address such questions inclusive of the inquiry however obtains the objective of connecting the prevalence of alcohol related abuse amongst young people with recurring societal issues such as dysfunctional familial situations, crime rates, social unrest, unemployment, disengagement and ineffective preventative solutions. As Camden Youth Council we hope to contribute valuable opinions, ideas and solutions so as to effectively and collaboratively reduce the incidence of alcohol abuse amongst young people within New South Wales.

a) The effect of alcohol advertisements and promotions on young people, including consideration of the need to further restrict alcohol advertising promotion

"While many factors may influence an underage person's drinking decisions, including among other things parents, peers and the media, there is reason to believe that advertising also plays a role." (Federal Trade Commission, Self-Regulation in the Alcohol Industry, 1999)¹

The first step toward reducing alcohol abuse amongst young people in NSW is to review the frequency of alcohol-related advertisements, agreements and sponsorships with sporting teams, in collaboration with associated images of specific brands of alcohol throughout all forms of visual media and their consequent implications.

It would be ignorant to conclude that advertisements through the media are the only factor contributing to alcohol abuse amongst our young people, however it is a central factor which predisposes our young people to certain attitudes of social acceptability toward a range of drinking behaviours from a young age – as well as a general familiarity with alcohol itself as a consequence of persistently being exposed to advertisements relating to alcohol. This may (depending on the individual) provoke intentions to consume alcohol, 'binge drink' and adopt a false sensationalist attitude and perception toward alcohol in that it is somewhat 'cool' to drink excessively. Alcohol as a product is essentially sensationalised, which in current society will have more of an impact due to the consumerist nature of our society. Further rapid technological advancements through social media (Facebook/twitter) creates a direct link with the media and advertising which results in certain behaviours on the basis of the false perceptions created about alcohol due to such advertisements.

Are we sending the wrong messages to our young people? Yes we are. We send mixed messages. Firstly we allow beer brands to sponsor major sporting events and teams, which inevitably forms part of our everyday culture saying that it is ok to mix alcohol with sport. This becomes the inevitable message sent even though it is indirect. This is a matter of reading between the lines. Yet the incidence of alcohol abuse cannot be simply narrowed down to advertising, there are a multiplicity of factors which connectively result in alcohol abuse through genetics, social upbringing, values instilled toward alcohol on behalf of families which can be of an increasingly positive or negative nature.

Camden Youth Council perceives alcohol advertisements and promotions not only in the form of media but also in terms of general societal behaviour within social settings and the family environment. This essentially 'promotes' the use of alcohol and perhaps acts as a contributing factor toward the developing 'abuse' of alcohol. Generally there is this floating stereotype that alcohol is a coping mechanism in itself. Not only should this inquiry look at the role of advertising and promotional media however this inquiry should delve into the **ROOT CAUSES** of alcohol abuse which reflects familial orientation and education. For example, schools and parents should play a larger role in educating our young people about the **risks** of **alcohol abuse** and enforce these messages in having guest speakers who have been detrimentally affected by their actions of misusing alcohol. Realistically young people abuse alcohol either for a reason (dysfunctional family, psychological means of coping with difficulties of adolescence/school etc) or as a result of a 'followers' mentality in terms of being influenced by peers who otherwise create trouble. So it really is a vicious cycle and drug/alcohol abuse will never be completely eradicated. However it can be prevented and the root cause is the attitude of our young people and society in connection with the functionality of the family and social environment.

Now let's consider the effect of restricting alcohol advertising and promotion – will this solve the problem? No. We don't believe this to be the case as the more we try to hide the existence of alcohol, the more young people are likely to misuse it, the more likely they will rebel through binge drinking and underage drinking. We believe the solution lies with policy makers /media altering regulations and the ways in which alcohol advertisements are executed in terms of the ways in which the product is portrayed to the public and essentially toward our young people. We must also question the extent to which alcohol advertisements should be constrained and what forms of promotion should be scrapped altogether e.g. radio, television, print advertisements, internet, association of brands with sporting/cultural events. What is alarming however is the way alcohol promotions target young people in placing the alcoholic product within a social/sporting context which applies to an everyday lifestyle setting and consequently portrays a lifestyle to which young people may aspire or 'perceive' to aspire toward due to the sensationalist nature of such advertisements.

Are our broadcasting networks abiding by the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code? We believe not as young people and even children are being targeted with pressures to drink increasing especially in young males – generally associated with sport (which again interconnects with the partnership formed between

beer and Rugby League as to reinforce 'old signifiers of masculine potency' and national pride). An example of advertisements breaching the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code is made evident through a study conducted by University of Wollongong in 2007 whereby a sample of 287 young people recruited from diverse environments/settings (high school, university, TAFE, workforce) were questioned on the believability of the messages portrayed through such advertisements. This study conclusively found that the majority of adolescents believe alcohol advertisements often include several messages which breach the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC) thus highlighting the ineffective nature of this self-regulatory scheme.¹ 74% of responses indicated that the advertisement contained the message that drinking the advertised product would make them more sociable and outgoing; 89.9% reflected that the advertisement suggested the product would help them have a great time; 69.8% reflected that it would help them fit in, 64.9% that it would help them feel more confident, 58.9% that it would help them feel less nervous, 46.5% it would help them succeed with the opposite sex, and 42% that it would make them feel more attractive² thus being a profound cause of significant physical, emotional and social harm within our society.

A major concern relates to the complex ways in which alcohol advertising and promotions alter young people's perceptions of alcohol and 'normative' behaviour when it comes to drinking itself. There is much contention surrounding the relationship between advertising and alcoholic consumption and as to whether or not there is a direct link in terms of abusive alcoholic behaviours. In regards to advertising acting as the initial stage of influencing young people to form a false, 'hyper-real' attitude towards alcohol and the so called life-style/social benefits which creates a perceived intention to drink and the ability to recall advertisements linking alcoholic behaviours. A generalised sensationalist/false perception is that all teenagers get drunk/binge drink/undertake immense risks whilst consuming alcohol through drink driving/stunts/drinking games/unprotected sex - or that this is "NORMAL" behaviour in order to be accepted within the world of adolescence. So this issue is much more complex than meets the eye- it is a societal issue/an issue of 'fitting in', keeping up with media and what teenagers 'should be doing'. According to the media world as such which only creates misconceptions on behalf of young people who are led to believe that alcohol is the key to independence, adulthood, a sense of freedom and a perceived

¹ University of Wollongong Research Online Faculty of Health and Behavioural Sciences – [What does Alcohol Advertising tell Young People about Drinking?](#) By Sarah C. Jones and P. Gregory, 2007.

² Ibid, page 1169.

mechanism toward having a 'good time'. This is a vicious cycle which only leads to mental health issues, increased deaths/health related issues/disorders relating to the abuse of alcohol such as domestic violence.

We cannot completely ban advertising and promotions as it plays too big of an economic, cultural and social role in today's day and age and we believe this action will only worsen the problem. The emphasis needs to be placed on preventative measures like education, raising awareness toward the implications of alcohol abuse as exemplified locally through the **YOUTH SOLUTIONS CAMPAIGN 'celebrate safe. No regrets'**³ which acts as a preventative mechanism in reducing the likelihood of alcoholic abuse throughout the summer break – a time of celebration.

Government policies and regulations must be implemented following on from The Australian Medical Association conducting a National Summit on Alcohol Marketing to Young People at Parliament House in Canberra, in association with the 70-member National Alliance for Action on Alcohol (NAAA) in September this year 2012 who recommended:

As a crucial first step in establishing this regulation, the AMA and NAAA call on the Australian Government to establish a major Parliamentary Inquiry, which includes the following within its Terms of Reference:

1. A comprehensive analysis of the extent to which children, teenagers and young Australians are exposed to alcohol advertising and promotion, and the modes and contexts in which it occurs. As part of this, the Inquiry should:

- Include a substantial focus on marketing techniques in digital platforms and in new and emerging social media, and the extent to which these platforms and media are targeted;
- Include a focus on alcohol industry sponsorship of sporting and youth cultural and music events and alcohol promotion targeting tertiary education students, and

³ Youth solutions is a Youth Drug and Alcohol prevention and health program charity working with young people 12-25 years of age and the broader community in the Macarthur and Wingecarribee regions of NSW to provide such regions with a specialist resource in youth drug and alcohol prevention and to develop and maintain drug and alcohol health promotion strategies, in an effort to prevent or reduce alcohol or drug related harm among young people.

- Use its powers to require leading alcohol companies and their communications agencies to table their annual expenditure, and to provide research and planning documents on alcohol promotion and marketing.
- 2. A comprehensive independent review and analysis of research on the impacts of alcohol advertising and promotion on the attitudes and behaviours of young Australians regarding alcohol consumption.
- 3. A 'failure-analysis' of the voluntary, industry-administered, code of alcohol advertising practice that currently operates in Australia.
- 4. Recommended best practice approaches to government regulatory schemes for alcohol marketing.⁴

Are these strategies and initiatives being implemented? There is too much talk and not enough action as incidences of alcohol abuse increase. We feel the solution partly lies with increasing the legal drinking age to 21 (as at 18 years of age the brain has not developed to its full capacity and alcohol abuse leads to long term health issues disrupting a young person's natural course of growth).

The rise of Alco pops, designer drinks or pre-packaged mixed drinks (such as bourbon and cola) seem to be linked to the rise in binge drinking amongst teenagers. Alco pops or Ready To mix Drinks (RTD's) have been found to be the most common first drink for teenagers. Researchers conclude that the target market for Alco pops is the 13-16 age groups. This is because Alco pops are often packaged to appear similar to branded fizzy drinks, and are affordable for young people because they are cheap to purchase individually. Alco pops are particularly hazardous because some pre-mixed drinks may contain up to three standard drinks of alcohol, a fact that many young people and their parents may be unaware of.⁵

The Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance created a report on the 'Marketing and Promotion of Alcohol' which focused on alcoholic consumption being the central cause of harm and influence in altering

⁴ <https://ama.com.au/media/communique-national-summit-alcohol-marketing-young-people>

⁵ The Facts, Binge Drinking and Alcohol Abuse – The Salvation Army

attitudes and perceptions toward the product. The Alliance recommends actions of phasing out alcohol advertising/promotions and the process of banning alcohol advertisements during live daytime broadcasts in conjunction with phasing out sponsorship for sporting events on behalf of alcoholic brands. Further recommendations are reflected through introducing a regulatory framework for alcohol advertising through establishing an independent body for administering and monitoring the system whilst attaining powers to investigate and penalise breaches. In 2007 49% of alcohol advertisements on free to air television were broadcast during the daytime. Comparatively a US Study of the impact of exposing 15-26 year olds to alcohol through advertising whereby each additional advertisement resulted in an increased of 1% in terms of the number of drinks consumed whilst each additional dollar spent on alcohol advertisements per capita resulted in an increase in the number of drinks being consumed by 3%. In 2007 people under the age of 18 were exposed to advertising for beer and wine at a rate of 72-84%.

Risky drinking behaviours are a common practice among young people in Australia - by 18 years 50% of males and females are risky drinkers in that people aged 18-24 incur the highest prevalence of high risk alcohol consumption. The World Health Organisation identified alcohol marketing as a major public health concern whereby restricting alcohol advertising and promotion is identified as an important cost-effective policy measure to reduce alcohol related harms internationally and within Australia.

The Cancer Council Australia created a Position Statement on the Marketing and Promotion of alcohol which resulted in recommendations toward improved regulation of alcohol advertising as to form part of a comprehensive strategy to minimise harm. Cancer Council further recommends the action of introducing legislation to prohibit alcohol advertising that appeals to people under the age of 25 whilst implementing a phased introduction of restrictions especially in terms of sporting and cultural events.

Current marketing strategies have developed in complexity and innovation through involving multiple technologies and channels. Econometric studies analyse the relationship between overall levels of alcohol consumption (often demonstrate little or no effect of advertising on aggregate alcohol consumption whilst some studies find a direct effect and link).

Exposure to alcohol advertising shapes young people's beliefs, attitudes, drinking behaviours and duplicates the risk of alcohol related problems later in life.

Currently the regulation of the content and placement of alcohol advertising is limited as it is largely self regulated (voluntary industry codes of practice). The Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC) required advertisements to present a mature, balanced and responsible approach to drinking so as to not have strong/evident appeals to children and adolescents or to depict consumption as contributing to personal, business, social, sporting, sexual or other success.

b) The effectiveness of alcohol harm minimisation strategies targeted at young people

Random breath testing is proven to be effective in the sense of reducing injuries/drink-driving related deaths in conjunction with the provisions placed upon P1 and P2 licenses – Blood Alcohol level of zero being effective in the sense of strict enforceability. Various campaigns have been initiated on behalf of Youth Solutions as a local organisation with objectives of minimising harm thus proving effective in terms of raising awareness and the circulation of public education toward such issues of concern whereby multiple information packs have been released from Youth solutions in connection with actions of visiting schools to educate the effects of intoxication as well as the detrimental impacts upon one's health/ how to drink responsibly and monitor one's consumption through 'Youth Safe' and connecting youth organisations/youth advisory councils as a means of networking in order to extend upon this action of raising awareness. However one must question if brochures and information packs from the NSW Department of Health is enough to effectively minimise alcohol related harm? Currently there are various state operated strategies yet there needs to be national campaign strategy against alcohol minimisation so as to strengthen the way each state individually and collaboratively deals with such issues e.g. Australia's current National Drug Strategy obtains the objective to 'prevent the uptake and minimise the harmful effects of drug use in Australian society' as alcohol is essentially a drug in that there is much misconception surrounding this very fact.

c) Measures to minimise the impact of alcohol in the workplace

Codes of practice need to be forcefully implemented within the workplace strictly banning the consumption of alcohol and the presence of alcohol on the premises during work hours. The consumption of alcohol is not necessary as it does not benefit employers/employees/businesses in any shape or form. If such codes of practice are breached then employers must enforce consequences/punishments for the unacceptable conduct of staff.

If employees are suffering from alcohol related harm/issues –employers should offer rehabilitative help and perhaps the government should fund a ‘workplace’ program where people affected by alcohol – which is in turn identified within the workplace can be transferred to a rehabilitative program in order to stop the cycle. Developments of effective, safe, supportive, enforceable workplace alcohol policies including a set of actions to be carried out if an employee is in need of treatment/vulnerable to alcoholic issues which may interfere with productivity within the workplace.

d) Effectiveness of measures to reduce drink- driving

Random Breath Testing – police have set an ambitious task of conducting more than 1 million random breath tests this summer. RBT is an immense success in NSW – having saved 7000 lives. Acting Deputy Police Commissioner Mark Murdoch said road fatalities had dramatically dropped from 1253 in 1982 to 364 last year, thus RBT is immensely effective on not only reducing drink-driving however consequent fatalities such as injury and death. Strict provisions of P1 and P2 licenses being a Blood Alcohol Limit of zero are proving to be increasingly effective at reducing the fatalities due to the strict nature of such enforceable laws.

e) Measures to reduce alcohol related violence including in and around licensed venues.

Increased surveillance – especially within and around venues deemed to be ‘violent’ or to attract young people – reject intoxicated individuals within the venue – perhaps even employ shuttle buses to take intoxicated individuals home so as to not cause further trouble which could be adopted by the government as a preventative initiative. Reducing the hours of operation in terms of liquor stores, pubs and clubs so as to close earlier – there is much debate surrounding this suggestion however in identifying the times where violence is more likely to occur e.g. after midnight perhaps or following ‘happy hour’ then the premises should close. Perhaps decreasing the ‘happy hour’ to half an hour or so. Police to be patrolling venues with social and situational crime prevention measures such as signs/warnings/cautions acting as a reminder of the consequences of violence within the premises. Further checks are to be made on the criminal history of people entering pubs/clubs and their likelihood to commit violent acts.

Prohibiting sale of shots/mixed drinks with an alcoholic content of more than 5% after 10pm – lockout at 1am perhaps (this will reduce the violence and relieve pressures on hospitals).

Somehow reduce ‘pre-drinking’ where many individuals drink prior to going out which is what many will do if drinks are not supplied at 10pm and if lockouts occur – drinking will occur after – still lead to alcohol related violence. Mandatory closing hours to apply to all venues across the board. Are these extreme measures or necessary actions?

f) Measures to address the impact of alcohol abuse on the health system

Reducing operation hours of venues is needed so as to decrease the amount of alcohol related incidences occurring (however one must question if this is only a band-aid approach – it may backfire and lead to violence on the streets - this means more police must patrol within and outside the premises making sure no further violence/anti-social behaviour takes place).

More funding to be given to hospitals in order to build necessary infrastructure/ employ necessary staff/workers to deal specifically with alcohol related behaviours/incidences through violence and anti-social behaviour. This is a complex issue – which needs preventative solutions.

Alcohol related abuse not only incurs immense implications and impacts upon young people however it further enforces pressures upon the health system in terms of the processes in which hospitals adopt to deal with and manage alcohol related hospitalisation. The Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation (AER Foundation) conducted a study into the harm caused by the drinking of others, thus being a stark reminder that the health impact of alcohol abuse extends far beyond the drinker according to the AMA (NSW). The AER Foundation has found that the total cost of alcohol misuse in Australia is now estimated at \$36 billion annually. AMA (NSW) President Dr Michael Steiner reflected that the strain placed on the health system by alcohol abuse is usually focused on the drinkers themselves however the medical impact upon the rest of the community is immense. “This report highlights that it’s not just the drinker who is hurt by alcohol abuse. It shows that in 2005, there were 367 deaths and 13,669 hospitalisations because of the drinking of others” (Dr Michael Steiner). “Imagine the relief on the health system if we could reduce this incredible number of avoidable hospitalisations.” The total morbidity costs of the drinking of others has been estimated in the AER foundation report to total \$88.6 million being inclusive of hospital related costs, road crash injury cases and assault. “The massive health impact of alcohol abuse on the drinker and those around them is a strain we just can’t afford.”⁶

⁶ <http://amansw.com.au/news/articles/health-impact-of-alcohol-abuse-goes-far-beyond-the-drinker/>
Health impact of alcohol abuse goes far beyond the drinker – Australian Medical Association NSW

Through this it is clear that further prevention measures are needed in order to decrease the unnecessary strain imposed upon the NSW health system through providing education to both young people and the general public with regards to the dangerous implications of behaviours involving notions of alcoholic abuse. Further funding is needed within the health system as opposed to \$3 billion being cut from the NSW Health system over the next four years. Such illogical cuts to health funding will only increased rates of chaos within NSW hospitals, thus increasing strains and pressures placed upon the health system which will affect every aspect of our NSW hospitals including the availability of resources thus resulting with the inability to deal with alcoholic abuse. With an inability to deal with alcohol related issues within the health system effectively comes an inability to deal with the issues at hand which only duplicates and exemplifies the issues as opposed to preventing and remedying alcoholic abuse amongst young people in NSW. This very notion is reinforced by a report titled 'The avoidable costs of alcohol abuse in Australia and the potential benefits of effective policies to reduce the social costs of alcohol' by David J. Collins of Macquarie University. This report reflects on the significance of creating innovative and creative policies of sustainability as a means of ensuring social stability is achieved and maintained through increased funding and the expansion of facilities and staff within hospitals as to effectively deal with the incidence of alcohol abuse on a medical level.

g) Any other related matter

It is clear that alcohol poses immense issues upon society – especially our vulnerable young people. Preventative action must be taken before the issue worsens.

We must further take into consideration the statistical trends which have been made apparent on behalf of the NSW Parliamentary Research Service Report 'Health Indicators for NSW' by Talina Drabsch. This report highlights the occurrence of risky drinking behaviours among males as proportionally higher being 28%⁷ as opposed to females being at a 'risk' rate of 10%⁸ as of 2010. This notion reinforces the significance of further analysing the causes of risky drinking behaviours amongst males in terms of gender and the associated increased likelihood of males becoming more susceptible to self-imposed alcohol related abuse. This vulnerability is only exemplified when present in social settings through peer-pressure and alcohol related drinking games whereby the stigma attached to the male persona is this notion of being able to hold one's drink as to establish themselves as a real 'man.' This attitude is both a direct and indirect societal paradigm which underlies the course of adolescence and adulthood not only centrally among males however, increasingly among females where attitudes toward risky alcoholic behaviours are socially acceptable.

As established above it is clear males are increasingly more susceptible and vulnerable to risky drinking behaviours due to conscious and subconscious societal attitudes which actively infiltrate the media through beer advertisements stating the consumption of VB is what makes a man 'a man.' This vulnerability not only forms as a result of illogical messages being conveyed through the media however it is also apparent through one's upbringing, familial values, socio-economic situation, demographics in terms of age, culture, education and personal abilities and skills to make informed and safe decisions toward the consumption of alcohol. There are a multiplicity of complex causes and triggers toward young people adopting risky drinking behaviours.

⁷ [http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/publications.nsf/key/HealthIndicatorsNSW/\\$File/Health+2012](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/publications.nsf/key/HealthIndicatorsNSW/$File/Health+2012).

NSW Parliamentary Research Service Report 'Health Indicators for NSW Statistical Indicators 6/12' by Talina Drabsch, page 14.

⁸ Ibid

The initial factor relates to the notion of alcohol functioning as a coping mechanism toward various life-changes in which adolescents experience in terms of relationships, stresses and pressures associated with schooling (in particular the Higher School Certificate), social 'requirements' as a means of being socially accepted as adolescents battle with a persistent struggle to fit in especially as a result of rapid technological advancement which places an increased focus on body image, and how an individual presents themselves online as to essentially create a 'hyper-real' persona one perceives to be real. So this notion of technology allowing people and in particular adolescents to post everything about themselves and their lives in fact causes an array of mental health issues and concerns in terms of self-esteem and pressures to consistently keep up with the demands of both technology and a newly emerging society which as we speak are developing new and different values. One of these newly developed attitudes is one of alcohol consumption and the perception that the consumption of alcohol signifies a transition from adulthood into adolescence yet this ideology in itself is ironic as teenagers as young as thirteen become increasingly involved in alcohol related abuse as they are predisposed and exposed to alcohol advertisements, campaigns and a range of adopted drinking behaviours on behalf of family, friends and society. Yet one must acknowledge that we cannot completely censor and restrict everything deemed to be inappropriate including alcohol advertising and consumption. This is why the government at a local, state, national and international level must work together with Youth organisations and our constituents being the young people of NSW to strike a delicate balance between enforcing restrictions and pro-actively dealing with the issues at hand. We cannot purely restrict and censor alcohol advertisements and campaigns – this is just a band aid solution and will not address the root causes and implications associated with risky drinking behaviours such as binge drinking/underage drinking.

We must delve into the causes and understand the experiences, mentality and minds of youth people within today's society. We must understand that adolescents face various challenges, pressures and stresses in which society and the sensationalist media primarily place upon today's youth. Thus it has become apparent that young people may drink for sociability which is associated with the perception that one cannot have a good time without consuming alcohol, cultural participation, religious observance, peer influence/pressure, relaxation, mood alteration, enhanced creativity, intoxication, boredom, habit and to

escape reality as a means of 'drowning one's sorrows'.⁹ Further education with regards to alcoholic consumption, the associated risks and harmful processes enforced upon the body as a result of binge drinking in conjunction with underage drinking.

A 2002 National Survey on the use of alcohol on behalf of Australian secondary students (White and Hayman 2004) concluded that experience with alcohol was high among secondary school students with alcohol consumption becoming more common as age increased whereby by the age of age 14, 90% of students had consumed alcohol with 70% of students by age 17 consuming alcohol the month prior to the survey whilst alarmingly the proportion of students drinking in the week before the survey increased with age from 19% of 12 year olds to a peak of 50% among 17 year olds.¹⁰

This statistical evidence only reinforces further concerns of crime associated with increased alcoholic consumption through actions of vandalism, drink driving, and alcohol related violence causing public/social disturbances. Not only is alcohol abuse among young people an issue for young people however it expands into a greater societal concern in terms of crime, social unrest, disengagement, unemployment and levels of safety and security within the community. It is not only significant to investigate the rate of alcohol abuse within NSW however also that of Australia as a nation in order for state governments to collaborate, initiate and implement a national strategy of action through increasing the level of alcohol and health education received by secondary school students and perhaps even considering compulsory health classes and seminars with regards to drugs and alcohol as part of the Year 11 and 12 curriculum where such issues become most pertinent. Personal Development Health and Physical Education is a compulsory component of Years 7-10 however it not compulsory in Year 11 and 12 in any shape or form. I recommend introducing a form of drug/alcohol education to senior students as such issues are most relevant to this age group.

An increased level of risk-taking is made apparent amongst people aged 15-24 due to rapid psychological, personal, societal and physical transitions. Such transitions from childhood into adolescence and adulthood

⁹ <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/your-health/alcohol-guidelines/alcohol-and-health-australia> -Alcohol and Health in Australia - National Health and Medical Research Council, viewed 21-1-13.

¹⁰ Ibid

prove to be increasingly challenging and often involve experimentation with drugs and alcohol which only leads to the adoption of risky behaviours such as drink driving, the consumption of illicit drugs which may further lead to being charged with criminal offences thus placing further pressures upon the Criminal Justice System in terms of Juvenile Justice/Offenders whereby further investigation is needed into implementing processes which rehabilitate young offenders and re-integrate their functionality into the community and broader society.

An article released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics titled 'Australian Social Trends, 2008' examines the risky behaviours of young people with a specific focus on risks where the potential harm is immediate in conjunction with long-term health and well being.¹¹ This article further establishes the scale and patterns of risky behaviours which differ between young men and young women, with prevalence being higher among young men. In the 2007 National Drug Strategy Household survey, 19% of young men aged between 18 and 24 years reported that they had engaged in risky/high risk drinking at least once a week during the last twelve months which was double the comparable rate of regular risky/high risk drinking among men aged 25 years and over (8%).¹² Among young women 16% reported risky/high risk drinking on a regular basis being three times as high as the proportion of women aged 25 years and over (5%).¹³ Such statistical evidence reinforces the immense differences amongst 13-17 year olds and 18-25 year olds despite all being placed within the one category as 'young people.' It is really significant to understand that age appropriate measures must be implemented and devised in accordance to developmental differences in terms of mentality and the stage of life a young person is within. With this knowledge of differing developmental stages associated with young adolescents and older adolescents the concerns grow in complexity and seriousness not only in terms of the implications of alcohol related abuse (crime etc) however the processes of rehabilitation and changing unhealthy and careless attitudes toward alcohol which may in fact be a generalisation but nevertheless a concern.

¹¹ <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Chapter5002008>

Australian Social Trends – Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

h) Recommendations

- More funding for education in schools, colleges, TAFE, and universities on the safe consumption of alcohol
- More funding for government and non-government organisations to run workshops, events, and promotional material, promoting safe consumption of alcohol and discouraging binge drinking and highlighting the negative side effects of unsafe or over-consumption of alcohol
- Better communication and cooperation between Federal, state and local governments, as well as non-government organisations to come up with collective solutions in relation to alcohol abuse amongst young people
- The NSW government should aim to consult and collaborate with young people from different communities, to come up with realistic solutions (that the young people themselves want) to alcohol abuse amongst young people
- More community awareness (amongst young people and the wider community) about the dangers of binge drinking and alcohol abuse
- The NSW government should work with mental health organisations, and youth services, to promote and gain trust and a working relationship with young people in the community and to try to get to the root of the problem, including why young people get into an unhealthy habit of binge drinking or alcohol abuse
- There should be a focus on different groups of young people in different areas, and consultations with them, to ensure that any solutions made will be tailored to different groups of young people and their particular needs and wants (e.g. rural communities, indigenous communities, immigrant/refugee communities etc)