



Foundation for Alcohol Research & Education

23 January 2020

Mental Health Inquiry
Productivity Commission
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Canberra City ACT 2601, Australia

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Dear Commissioner

NEW REVIEW – ALCOHOL AND MENTAL HEALTH

In addition to our initial submission to this inquiry, I wish to bring the Commission's attention to some recent work on alcohol and mental health from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC).

The NHMRC Draft Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol note that:

The relationship between heavier alcohol consumption and mental health issues is well documented. Alcohol use increases the risk of many mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety. Also, people with pre-existing mental health conditions are more at risk of using alcohol in a hazardous way. The combination of alcohol misuse and depression increases the risk of suicidal behaviour. Alcohol also may affect the efficacy of antidepressant medication.ⁱ

FARE would like to draw the Commission's attention in particular to the NHMRC's *Guideline Two: Children and young people under 18 years of age* which states that to reduce the risk of injury and other harms to health, children and young people under 18 years of age should not drink alcohol. The rationale for this guideline includes the increased mental health risks, including increased risk of alcohol dependence. Studies show that the later young people delay their first alcoholic drink the less likely they are to develop an alcohol use disorder.

FARE urges the Commission to think carefully about a whole suite of measures for preventive actions with young populations that address both social and commercial determinants of health, including reduced intake of alcohol and other drugs.

In developing the Draft Guidelines the NHMRC commissioned a number of evidence reviews. Two are of particular relevance to this inquiry:

- Systematic literature review on the association between alcohol consumption and mental health disordersⁱⁱ

- Technical report - Systematic literature review on the association between alcohol consumption and mental health disordersⁱⁱⁱ

We hope this additional information is of use to the Commission. FARE reiterates that policy measures to reduce the consumption of alcohol across the whole population will contribute to gains in wellbeing and health for all Australians, and reduce the burden on the mental health and health systems. As always we are happy to provide any further information that would be of use. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me

Yours sincerely

PATRICIA HEPWORTH
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Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education

ⁱ National Health and Medical Research Council (2019) *Draft Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol* available at:

https://online.nhmrc.gov.au/sites/default/files/alcohol/draft_australian_guidelines_to_reduce_health_risks_from_drinking_alcohol.pdf

ⁱⁱ The University of Adelaide (2018) *Evidence evaluation report – Systematic literature review on the association between alcohol consumption and mental health disorders* Adelaide Health Technology Assessment 2018 available at:

https://online.nhmrc.gov.au/sites/default/files/alcohol/evidence_evaluation_report_evaluating_evidence_on_the_health_effects_alcohol_consumption.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ The University of Adelaide (2018) *Technical report - Evidence evaluation report: Evaluating the evidence on the health effects of alcohol* Adelaide Health Technology Assessment 2018 available at:

https://online.nhmrc.gov.au/sites/default/files/alcohol/technical_report_evaluating_the_evidence_on_the_health_effects_alcohol_consumption.pdf