

Media Release

RACP submission to NT alcohol review

7 July 2017

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) has welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the Northern Territory Government's review of alcohol laws and policies and reduce alcohol-related harms in the community.

In its submission to the Alcohol Policy and Legislation Review, the RACP has made a number of evidence-based recommendations that have been implemented elsewhere in Australia and around the world.

"Our doctors see the harmful effects of alcohol on their patients every day, whether it's on their wards or in rehabilitation centres, liver clinics, emergency departments or assessing the impacts of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder on children," RACP President Dr Catherine Yelland said.

"We've recommended the Government ban alcohol advertising on public transport because the evidence tells us that advertising normalises alcohol and encourages children to start drinking earlier. Alcohol advertising also makes young drinkers more prone to binge drinking, and establishes young drinkers consuming alcohol at harmful levels.

"This recommendation is consistent with action that has been taken by other territory and state governments in the Australian Capital Territory and South Australia and is recommended by the World Health Organization."

Research shows that reducing outlet density can also lower levels of risky drinking.

"Evidence suggests that the number of liquor outlets and licensed venues in an area correlates with an increased incidence of high risk drinking and teenage binge drinking," Dr Yelland explained. "For example, a Victorian study has estimated that a 10 per cent increase in general licence rates in one area increased assault rates by 0.6 per cent.

"In the United Kingdom, local authorities can designate 'saturation zones' within licensing policies, meaning no new licensed premises are permitted in that area. This is an initiative we'd like the Government to look at as part of the review process."

Dr Yelland said the RACP would like to see a greater investment in drug and alcohol treatment services.

"Alcohol and drug treatment services must be properly funded regardless of whether they are provided in a major city or remote community," Dr Yelland said. "We're seeing as little as a 6% uptake in remote areas and 0.7% uptake in very remote areas for withdrawal management services, compared to 17.7% uptake in major cities. This disparity needs to be addressed with a greater investment in treatment and withdrawal services where they are most needed."

Dr Yelland welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the review process.

“The RACP welcomes the Government’s commitment to reviewing the Territory’s alcohol laws and policies,” Dr Yelland said. “We particularly support the Government’s commitment to addressing Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, which is a serious public health problem.”

The RACP submission draws extensively from the evidence discussed and cited in its 2016 Alcohol Policy, developed jointly with the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP).

To read the RACP’s submission go to: <http://bit.ly/2srlKw>.

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About The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP): The RACP trains, educates and advocates on behalf of more than 15,000 physicians and 7,500 trainee physicians across Australia and New Zealand.

The College represents a broad range of medical specialties including general medicine, paediatrics and child health, cardiology, respiratory medicine, neurology, oncology, public health medicine, occupational and environmental medicine, palliative medicine, sexual health medicine, rehabilitation medicine, geriatric medicine and addiction medicine. Beyond the drive for medical excellence, the RACP is committed to developing health and social policies which bring vital improvements to the wellbeing of patients.

The College offers 60 training pathways. These lead to the award of one of seven qualifications that align with 45 specialist titles recognised by the Medical Board of Australia or allow for registration in nine vocational scopes with the Medical Council of New Zealand.