

STATEMENT OF CONCERN

Alcohol needs to be addressed in family violence strategies

27 OCTOBER 2016

Today our leaders will meet in Brisbane for the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Summit on reducing violence against women and their children. The continued national focus on the need to address family violence should be congratulated.

However, to date we are still failing to acknowledge and address many of the factors that contribute to family violence. We fear that the forum today and the future discussions will continue to ignore alcohol's role in family violence and fail to embrace strategies to address the issue.

We know from our research that the role of alcohol in family violence cannot be ignored. Alcohol contributes to between 23 to 65 per cent of domestic incidents reported to police and between 15 to 47 per cent of child abuse cases reported in Australia.¹ More than a third of intimate partner homicides involve alcohol consumption by the perpetrator.² The impact of alcohol on children is also significant, prenatal exposure to alcohol may result in Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), which are associated with increased risk of maltreatment and other problems including violence later in life. We also know individuals living with FASD are more likely to be either victims or perpetrators of violence.

Decades of consistent evidence across the scientific literature has shown that alcohol increases the risk and severity of violence within intimate relationships.³ Our research has also found that increases in the number of alcohol outlets, particularly those selling alcohol for home consumption, are strongly associated with increased rates of domestic violence.⁴

Until governments give more than thoughtful consideration to the factors that contribute to family violence, such as alcohol, the family violence discourse remains incomplete. This is to the detriment of families and communities across Australia.

Consistent with recommendations from the World Health Organization,⁵ we urge First Ministers, Families' Ministers, and the experts at the National Summit to expand the scope of consideration to include further evidence-based interventions that directly target the contributing factors of family violence. The evidence shows such interventions can bring about rapid and sustained reductions in the incidence of family violence.

Many interventions designed to reduce alcohol harm across Australia can be enacted swiftly and at low cost, resulting in immediate reductions in family violence. These solutions begin with reforming the taxation system to discourage the sale of cheap alcohol, reducing the physical availability of alcohol, and removing the sexualisation of women from alcohol advertisements. Addressing these factors will demonstrate real leadership and improve the safety of women and children across Australia.

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¹ Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education. (2015). *National Framework for action to prevent alcohol-related family violence*. Canberra: Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education.

² Cussen, T. & Bryant, W. (2015). *Domestic/family homicide in Australia*. Research in Practice No 38. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

³ Graham, K., Bernards, S., Wilsnack, S. C., & Gmel, G. (2011). Alcohol may not cause partner violence but it seems to make it worse: A cross national comparison of the relationship between alcohol and severity of partner violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 26(8), 1503-1523.

⁴ Livingston, M. (2011) A longitudinal analysis of alcohol outlet density and domestic violence, *Addiction* 106:919-925.

⁵ World Health Organization. (2010). Preventing intimate partner and sexual violence against women: taking action and generating evidence. Geneva: World Health Organization.