

# Community leaders call on Government to put health first and abandon plans to cut the price of alcohol

**22 February 2022**

More than 80 community leaders and organisations have signed an open letter to Treasurer, the Hon Josh Frydenberg MP, calling on the Government to abandon any plans to cut the price of alcohol because of the risk to the health, wellbeing and safety of Australians.

The letter was supported by organisations including the Cancer Council Australia, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), Full Stop Australia, Aboriginal Drug & Alcohol Council (ADAC), Australasian College for Emergency Medicine (ACEM), and other community leaders such as Former Australian of the year Fiona Stanley and Local Hero of the year Shanna Whan.

In the letter, community leaders said that any reductions to the price of alcoholic products would be devastating, particularly at a time when we're seeing increases in alcohol harm.

Alcohol contributes to a range of harms including alcohol use disorder, family violence, road traffic accidents, cancer, injury and death.

Between 2019 and 2020, Alcohol-induced deaths increased by 8.3 per cent, calls to the national alcohol and other drug hotline doubled, and there were increased ambulance callouts to homes because of alcohol harm.

Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Council CEO, Adjunct Associate Professor Scott Wilson, said at a time when many alcohol and other drug services are seeing an influx of people seeking help, the Government is sending the wrong message by considering alcohol tax cuts.

"We're already seeing a flood of people trying to access services because of alcohol, and I shudder to think of the impact on the community, if the price of alcohol is cut," A/Prof Wilson said.

Australasian College for Emergency Medicine President, Dr Claire Skinner, said that Emergency Departments (EDs) are already seeing significant numbers of alcohol-related presentations.

"Emergency Departments are already under immense pressure. Alcohol and other drug harm is one of the largest, preventable public health issues facing emergency departments. Cutting alcohol taxes could drive more harm and further increase avoidable presentations to EDs," Dr Skinner said.

FARE CEO, Ms Caterina Giorgi, said our priority should be improving the health and wellbeing of our community.

"Alcohol lobbyists have been pushing to cut alcohol taxes for decades. Now they are using the cover of the pandemic to push their agenda," Ms Giorgi said.

"At a time when alcohol harms and demand for health and community services are rising, it makes no sense to cut alcohol taxes, which will increase alcohol harm."

Read the letter <https://fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Alcohol-Tax-Open-Letter.pdf>

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21 February 2022

The Hon Josh Frydenberg MP  
Treasurer  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
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Cc: The Hon Greg Hunt MP, Minister for Health and Aged Care

Dear Treasurer

**Put the health, wellbeing and safety of Australians first and abandon any plans to cut the price of alcohol**

For us all, the most important thing is the health and wellbeing of our families and communities. Right now, this includes doing all we can to prevent people from contracting COVID-19 and also preventing the shadow pandemics of worsening mental health and increases in family violence, both of which are exacerbated by alcohol.

As health, social and community organisations and advocates, we strongly oppose any moves to reduce the price of alcohol through reductions in the beer and spirit excise in the next Budget or as an election commitment. It is well established that decreasing the price of alcohol results in increases in alcohol use and the associated health and social harms.<sup>1</sup>

Any reductions to the price of alcoholic products would be absolutely devastating, at a time when we are seeing increases in the many harms from alcohol that negatively impact on far too many Australians.

Between 2019 and 2020, we saw an 8.3% increase in the rate of alcohol-induced deaths.<sup>2</sup> We saw an approximate doubling in calls to the National Alcohol and other Drug (AOD) hotline from early 2020, compared to the same period in 2019.<sup>3</sup> There have also been reports of increased involvement of alcohol in family violence incidents.<sup>4</sup>

These alcohol harms are the result of significant increases in alcohol sales during the pandemic. Alcohol manufacturers and retailers have been making super profits, with an increase of 29% in revenue between 2019 and 2021, resulting in an additional \$3.6 billion from alcohol retail sales.<sup>5</sup>

Any reductions in alcohol excise rates would result in alcohol being cheaper relative to the cost-of-living, and result in increases in alcohol harm. A reduction to the usual level of taxation revenue would also lower government resources that are desperately needed to manage this pandemic.

We urge you to abandon any plans to cut the excise of alcoholic products, and to prioritise the health, wellbeing and safety of families and communities.

Yours sincerely,



**SIGNATORIES ON FOLLOWING PAGE**

1 Elder RW, Lawrence B, Ferguson A, Naimi TS, Brewer RD, Chattopadhyay SK, et al. The Effectiveness of Tax Policy Interventions for Reducing Excessive Alcohol Consumption and Related Harms. American Journal of Preventive Medicine. 2010;38(2):217-29.  
2 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Causes of Death, Australia' (cat no. 3303.0, 29 September 2020).  
3 Data supplied by the Australian Government Department of Health  
4 Family violence and alcohol during Covid-19, May 2020. [Family-violence-and-alcohol-during-COVID-19\\_final.pdf \(fare.org.au\)](https://www.fare.org.au/family-violence-and-alcohol-during-COVID-19_final.pdf)  
5 Alcohol retail during COVID-19 (2020-2021), February 2022, [Alcohol-retail-during-COVID-19-2020-2021.pdf \(fare.org.au\)](https://www.fare.org.au/alcohol-retail-during-COVID-19-2020-2021.pdf)

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