

**TASKFORCESUBMISSION:** submission

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**POSITION:** Chief Executive Officer

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**SUBMISSION1:**

The Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation commends the National Preventative Health Taskforce on its discussion paper "Australia: The Healthiest Country by 2020". AER considers that the Technical Report No 3 is a comprehensive review of the international and Australian research relevant to primary prevention of alcohol related harm in Australia.

At a macro level, however, most of the areas canvassed, and actions proposed, are directed at Governments pursuing a medical/public health agenda. While this approach is important, the impact of alcohol on justice and welfare systems, community structures and relationships cannot be ignored. In rate terms, alcohol related harms are much higher in rural and remote Australia, particularly among the young and Indigenous Australians.

It is AER's view that a broad range of interventions, including building a civil society, actively involving local governments, involving police in community action, encouraging secondary and tertiary interventions and, most importantly, harnessing the expertise of the non-government sector to collaborate on local solutions are required to properly address this issue.

AER does support the suggested priorities. They are universally agreed to be the most effective strategies to reduce alcohol related harm and recent Australian research shows that they are also cost-effective. (See Doran C et al, "Identifying cost-effective interventions to reduce the burden of harm associated with alcohol misuse in Australia"; 2008, AER.)

In relation to the taxation of alcohol, see the submission from AER and a number of organisations and individuals to the Review of Australia's future tax system at [www.taxreview.treasury.gov.au](http://www.taxreview.treasury.gov.au). A very instructive lesson from the Government's decision to increase the excise on ready to drink spirit-based beverages is that significant price increases do reduce overall consumption. AER strongly supports the view of the Taskforce (p38 of the discussion paper) that the Henry Review provides "an opportunity to review and reform flaws in the current alcohol taxation system".

One of the key issues which finally broke the tobacco debate open was the overwhelming evidence of the health dangers of smoking. AER believes that the review of the risks associated with drinking, undertaken by the NH&MRC and published with the 2007 draft Australian Drinking Guidelines, presents a similar opportunity to make Australians aware of the short and long terms

risks of their alcohol consumption. Just as awareness of the dangers of smoking halved Australian's smoking rate, so a concerted exposure of the harms of risky drinking could assist in driving the cultural change we need to reduce alcohol related harm.

High risk groups tend not to listen to awareness-raising approaches, often responding "that happens to others not me". The results of the Northern Territory's Living with Alcohol program and the recent "alcopops tax" clearly show that price and physical availability are significant factors in rates of consumption. Using the taxation system to raise prices and regulating to reduce the physical availability of alcohol would have the best effect. The other intervention that has a high rating for effectiveness and cost-effectiveness, brief interventions by GPs, needs to be right at the forefront of strategies for working with risky drinkers.

AER calls on the Taskforce to confirm the order of its priorities for reducing alcohol related harm and to ensure that the implementation process involves all levels and arms of government, the non-government sector and, most importantly, the whole community.

**PRIVACY:** yes

**SUBMIT:** Submit