

'Alcohol and schools don't mix': Young people and under-age exposure

The Hawke's Bay population as a whole is drinking more hazardously than New Zealanders on average.¹

Of the approximately 20 thousand² young people aged 15–24 living in the region, over one in two males are drinking hazardously, and almost one in three females³, a rate significantly higher than the national average for the same age group (one in four).

In order to reduce the prevalence of hazardous drinking—particularly by Hawke's Bay young people—it is important that we all understand the harm caused by alcohol and the impact of alcohol exposure on children and young people.

Alcohol is heavily promoted in many settings in New Zealand. Of particular concern to the District Health Board is the presence and promotion of alcohol in schools and educational settings. The District Health Board is clear in its position: **alcohol and schools do not mix.** This position is shared by Medical Officers of Health throughout New Zealand and is evident in Australia, where concerns have been raised about alcohol's 'distinct presence' in schools.⁴

The issue

At present, a number of schools and educational settings in Hawke's Bay are using alcohol as a method of fundraising and entertainment. This is in spite of evidence demonstrating that exposure to alcohol during childhood and adolescence—either through witnessing adults drinking or via alcohol marketing—has shown to increase the likelihood of a young person drinking alcohol both at an earlier age, and of drinking more hazardously.⁵

¹ The Ministry of Health define hazardous drinking as an established pattern of drinking that carries a risk of harming physical or mental health, or having harmful social effects to the drinker or others. Hazardous drinking is defined by a score of 8 or more on the alcohol screening tool known as AUDIT, the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test

² Source data from Stats NZ Subnational population estimates (RC, AU), by age and sex at 30 June 1996, 2001, 2006-17 (2017 boundaries)

³ 41.1% of age group 15–24 years (or 53.9% males, 30.6% females) in Hawke's Bay (2011-14) as compared with 25.6% for NZ overall for same age group

⁴ Ward et al., 2014

⁵ Anderson, et al., 2009; Smith & Foxcroft, 2009; Ryan et al., 2010.

Our vision: Schools are recognised as significant spaces where the best interests of children are a primary consideration. Schools embrace their responsibility to create healthy and safe environments for children and communities by choosing to be alcohol-free.

How can Hawke's Bay achieve this?

Health

- Share health information with the Hawke's Bay population on the harms caused by alcohol, with particular attention to Boards of Trustees, school staff and parents
- Continue to oppose to special license applications for events held on school grounds when children's attendance is anticipated

Councils

- Host and advocate for more alcohol-free and family friendly events in Hawke's Bay
- Provide discounted alternative venues for schools that choose to sell and supply alcohol at their fundraising events – a great way to keep school grounds alcohol-free 24/7

Education sector

- Develop an Alcohol Policy that represents your school's community (for a template and guide visit: <http://ourhealthhb.nz/healthy-communities/alcohol/alcohol-and-schools/>)
- Get creative with other ways to fundraise – the DHB is producing a resource to help

Everybody

- Support by attending alcohol-free events in the region
- Talk to your child's school or ECE about alcohol – does their approach fit with the values of the community?
- Share your concerns about alcohol in your region with the District Health Board. Email us at healthpromotion@hbdhb.govt.nz

Why is alcohol being used in schools?

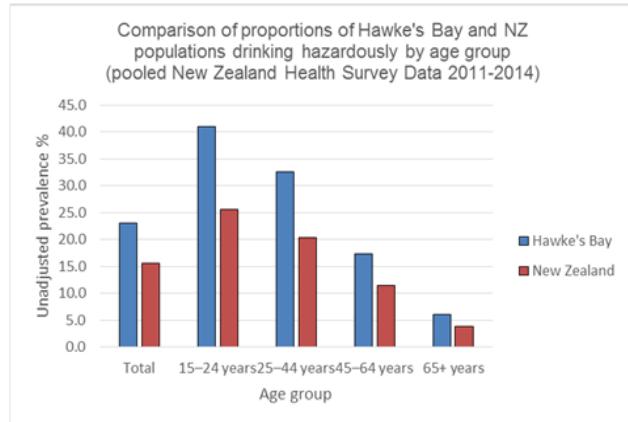
Schools and educational settings may choose to sell alcohol for one of three purposes:

1. To generate revenue—for example for immediate consumption at school fundraising events such as school fairs or quiz nights.
2. For celebration such as a prize-giving or jubilee celebration.
3. For recreational purposes—for example student discos, art shows or plays. Alternatively alcohol may be consumed by staff on school camps or at after work drinks.⁵

The HBDHB have collected data for the period March 2014 to October 2017 on the educational settings and the types of events where a license to sell alcohol was granted.

The data shows:

- 39% of applications were from primary or intermediate schools, 29% from secondary schools and 6% from early childhood centres
- Napier City had the highest number of applications per number of schools
- Lower decile schools were less likely to apply for a license
- Quiz, casino, bingo, movie and auction nights were the most common event where an alcohol license was granted and young people's attendance was anticipated.



The proportion of Hawke's Bay residents drinking hazardously is highest amongst the 15-24 year age group (as shown above).

Educational outcomes

We know that all schools work to give their students the best possible opportunities in life, and schools are quick to recognise that their influence extends beyond the classroom.

Many have vision statements or ambitions reflecting "Preparation for Life", or "Developing Young Minds", or "Nurturing Tomorrow's Leaders". These statements acknowledge that there is a wide curriculum of values and life skills. The importance of creating an environment that supports the development of positive values is also reflected in the National Administration Guideline 5. This guideline requires Boards of Trustees to provide a safe physical and emotional environment for students.

Educators know that their students learn not only what they are explicitly taught, but also from the actions and choices of the adults around them at school and in the community.

This role-modelling presents a contradiction between what young people might learn in their class about self-care and mind-altering substances and what they see from their school leaders when they rely on alcohol for fundraising or to have a good time.

The impact of alcohol exposure in childhood – the facts

What's wrong with alcohol anyway?

Although alcohol is sold next to the bread and milk in the supermarket, it is actually an addictive toxin that also causes cancer. Alcohol causes the most harm to the most people compared to any other drug.¹ Every year approximately 800 New Zealanders die from alcohol-related causes.

Despite this, alcohol is a product that is aggressively marketed, is very cheap and is available at almost all times of the day and night.

The human brain is not fully developed until the age of 25. Drinking alcohol regularly or binge-drinking before this age may prevent the brain developing properly.

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What evidence is there to show that drinking around children will cause them harm?

There is a growing body of evidence to show that children and young people who witness adults, particularly parents, consuming alcohol are more likely to start drinking at an earlier age, and drink more hazardously.⁶

Research also shows that children who witness their parents tipsy or drunk report feeling embarrassed, worried, that their parents had argued with them more than usual, paid them less attention and that their bedtime routine had been disrupted.⁷

Harm from alcohol can only come from drinking it

There are many ways that alcohol can cause harm and, unlike all other drugs, the harm from alcohol is more likely to be experienced by others, not the drinker. Harm to others can be direct (such as assaults, crime, healthcare costs, child neglect) or indirect (such as the normalisation and acceptance of hazardous drinking and the inheritance of hazardous drinking patterns).

Drinking responsibly in front of children teaches them how to drink responsibly

There is no evidence to show that drinking in front of children has positive benefits: in fact, research shows that children who witness adults drinking are more likely to start drinking at an earlier age and more hazardously.⁸

Children see adults drinking at home – what difference does it make if it's on school grounds?

The school environment represents one setting that has children's wellbeing interests at the centre. Schools may be the only safe space where young people can escape from the impact of alcohol misuse that may be occurring in their home or community. And, allowing alcohol in these settings reduces the effect of health promotion programmes and campaigns on the harms related to alcohol.

Alcohol is a normal part of social events – having the event on school grounds shouldn't make a difference

Allowing alcohol to be consumed in the school environment normalises and increases the perceived acceptability of alcohol use in all settings.

Using alcohol to fundraise at school events may also contravene the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, of which New Zealand is a signatory. Article 33 states that:

"Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislative, administrative, social and educational

measures, to protect children from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances as defined in the relevant international treaties, and to prevent the use of children in the illicit production and trafficking of such substances.⁹

It can be reasonably argued that some fundraising events in schools using children to promote the sale of alcohol, could be seen as a contravention to this Article and others under UNCROC.

There are other settings that are much harder hit by alcohol availability and alcohol-related harm

There are many settings that the District Health Board are working in. A focus on schools is consistent with the DHB's approach to denormalise alcohol around children. We also work to limit off-license availability, density and proximity to sensitive sites such as schools, ECEs, churches and marae and challenge the proliferation of outlets in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Why not focus on alcoholics?

It is a myth that a small minority of heavy drinkers cause the harm. Hawke's Bay rates of hazardous drinking are 60 per cent higher than New Zealand as a whole.¹⁰ This means that between one third and a quarter (27.1%) of the population in Hawke's Bay are harming themselves or others as a result of their drinking.

It's not parents that are the problem – young people are the worst drinkers – why not focus on them?

Young people learn from what adults' role model to them about what is, and what is not acceptable. A shift in attitude towards alcohol is needed to positively influence the next generation and reduce the alcohol-related harm.

Schools need alcohol to fundraise – we have to make alcohol available or people won't attend

The majority of schools in Hawke's Bay do not use alcohol to fundraise. Instead, they host family-friendly events that the whole community can attend.

If the evidence is really there – why isn't selling alcohol at school fundraising events banned?

Currently, there is no legislation that prohibits the selling or supplying of alcohol on school property. Boards of Trustees currently decide school policy matters. There is however both a strong moral argument and evidence that supports the removal of alcohol from schools.

⁶ Anderson et al., 2009; Smith & Foxcroft, 2009; Ryan et al., 2010

⁷ Institute of Alcohol Studies, 2017, <http://www.ias.org.uk/News/2017/18-October-2017-Like-sugar-for-adults-report-highlights-anxiety-about-parents-drinking.aspx>

⁸ Anderson et al., 2009; Smith & Foxcroft, 2009; Ryan et al., 2010

⁹ <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

¹⁰ New Zealand Health survey, 2011/14