
Opposition support for ‘alcopops’ bill can prevent cancer deaths

Excise increase a step towards better health

The Federal Opposition should be commended for supporting the increased excise on ready-to-drink spirit mixes because the tax could help prevent cancer deaths, Cancer Council Australia Chief Executive Officer, Professor Ian Olver, said today.

“While a comprehensive approach to alcohol control is required, sales data showed that the ‘alcopops’ tax was driving down net alcohol consumption, which on a population basis equates to reduced risk of alcohol-related cancers,” Professor Olver said.

“Around 1400 Australians die from alcohol-related cancers each year. This number could decrease significantly if the reductions in consumption that coincided with the ‘alcopops’ tax continue and are supported by other measures.”

Professor Olver said a growing evidence base linked alcohol consumption with breast cancer, so the ‘alcopops’ tax could be particularly effective if it discouraged young women from drinking excessively and developing chronic patterns of alcohol consumption.

He said there was no safe level of drinking when it came to cancer risk and that the more you drank, the greater the risk.

“As well as links between alcohol and breast cancer, there is convincing evidence that alcohol consumption can lead to cancers of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus and liver,” Professor Olver said.

“With evidence showing that people who binge drink when young are at higher risk of becoming chronic consumers of alcohol, the ‘alcopops’ excise is an important step towards a long-term culture change.”

Professor Olver said he hoped the Government would now apply the same principle of taxing harmful products to improve population health to tobacco excise when it responds to the recommendations of its own preventative health taskforce, which are expected to be submitted this month.

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