Stemming the tide of alcohol

Liquor licensing and the public interest

Edited by Elizabeth Manton, Robin Room, Caterina Giorgi and Michael Thorn
Foreword

When I chaired the National Preventative Health Taskforce from 2008 to 2011, I had the additional responsibility of chairing the development of a national strategy for alcohol, where our goal was to reduce the proportion of Australians drinking at both short-term and long-term risky levels (1:10). One key action area was to "improve the safety of people who drink and those around them" (1:24).

The Taskforce identified that liquor control laws in each state and territory, and the associated liquor licensing processes, were critical elements in contributing to a safer and healthier Australia by broadening the focus from market demand to consideration of the potential impact on local communities' health, economy and amenity (1:241–2). The Taskforce also identified the need to consider the key roles of police, law enforcement agencies, local communities, local government and the public generally in achieving best practice leading to harm minimisation.

This book, *Stemming the tide of alcohol: liquor licensing and the public interest*, is superbly placed to contribute to achieving this strategic goal. The co-editors are experienced researchers, policy developers and advocates in the alcohol field and have played an important role in pulling together this 24-chapter book in its valuable chapters themselves.

A major strength of the book is the Australia-wide range of contributors. The broad perspectives include sociology, medical anthropology, policing, criminology, epidemiology, marketing, Indigenous health, mental health, alcohol-related violence and liquor legislation, as well as perspectives from public health practitioners, policy developers, lawyers, community advocates, urban planners, social planners, an economist and an auditor-general. I recommend readers study the list of contributors to see the impressive range of people who have worked on this book.

Robin Room clarifies in his opening chapter that the aim of the book is to 'provide policy-makers, public health advocates, researchers, and community groups and members with a handbook that is informative about historical and current trends —how we got here, the current situation and where things are going—and about the state of research evidence on what is effective in what circumstances for public health purposes, and what is not effective'. I can't say it any better.

For too long in Australia the granting, owning and management of alcohol licences have not been taken seriously enough. Given that alcohol is 'no ordinary commodity' (2) and is a social drug that can cause great harm if inappropriately promoted, served or consumed, holding an alcohol licence should imply an obligation of a duty of care.

At a time when concern over the social and health-related impacts of alcohol continues to attract public attention, the role liquor licensing laws can play in addressing these concerns has never been clearer. For example, in January 2014, in response to alcohol-related violence, the New South Wales Government recommended a comprehensive package, including the introduction of 3 am last drinks across an expanded Sydney central business district precinct and 1:30 am lockouts, as well as a new state-wide 10 pm closing time for all boutique shops and liquor stores. But closing times and lockouts are only some of the liquor licensing policy levers available. Read this book to find out more about what can be done.

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