

Time for the alcohol industry to help out: National Council

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The Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) is calling on the Alcohol Industry to show community and moral responsibility by establishing an independently administered benefit fund to provide community based organizations with access to money for alcohol treatment and education programs.

Major Brian Watters, Chairman of the Council which is the peak advisory body to Government on drug policy established by the Prime Minister in March 1998, recently outlined some alarming facts and statistics of alcohol related harm in the Australia "Alcohol is second only to tobacco as the biggest cause of drug related hospitalisations and death in this country. The harms arising from alcohol pervade our society – health problems, motor vehicle accidents, family breakdowns and violence. The seriousness of this issue is further magnified when we consider that it is estimated that approximately half a million teenagers are already "regular drinkers", with most teenagers claiming they drink to get drunk. Each year across Australia there are over 5 million victims of verbal or physical abuse and over 1 million victims of property damage as a result of alcohol. Figures from Turning Point in Melbourne also suggest that ambulances there are called out more than 200 times each month, just in the metropolitan area, to attend alcohol overdose incidents"

"Although the Council has previously called for the introduction of a dedicated levy on alcohol to increase the price difference between beverages containing less alcohol and 'heavier' drinks, with the money generated to be directed entirely into alcohol education, prevention and treatment services, we also believe that the alcohol industry has a moral and social responsibility to contribute towards some of the costs of alcohol related harm in our community. Education and treatment continue to be two areas where there is a clear need for further funding." Major Watters said.

Major Watters went further adding - "This call by the Council is in complete accordance with calls for the establishment of social coalitions in our society to deal with issues that affect us all. The alcohol industry makes a lot of money from its products and an ongoing positive investment in the future of all Australians would undoubtedly be very welcome"

Mr Gino Vumbaca, Executive Officer for the Council added, "The Council is calling for a similar scheme to that which operates in some States and Territories with gambling, whereby the gambling industry have established a community benefit fund to allow organisations to access funds for programs to help those suffering because of gambling. As the community becomes more aware of just how much harm is stemming from the misuse of alcohol, the pressure on the alcohol industry to establish a similar fund will surely rise. It is not enough for the alcohol industry to simply highlight that it already pays its taxes given that all businesses pay taxes, the difference here is that their products are causing damage to the community."

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