

# Raising the Drinking Age – Adelaide Forum continues the conversation...

The first of a series of state forums to gauge community attitudes to and opinion on raising the drinking age back up to 21 was held at the HIVE Youth Centre, Modbury, on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> October.. A group of concerned community leaders, parents and young people attended and offered many challenging perspectives including the following:

Question/comment from the floor	Evidence based response
<p>What research supports raising the drinking age?</p>	<p>Professor John Toumbourou summarised the evidence for raising the Minimum Legal Drinking Age (MLDA) to 21 and described the options for implementing such a change. The reasons for raising the drinking age include: (1) rising rates of youth violent offending and alcohol related-harm; (2) scientific evidence that in the early twenties the brain is still developing and therefore vulnerable to damage through common patterns of youth alcohol use; (3) solutions such as taxation and regulation are not included in any major political party platform; and (4) support for this policy change has increased to 50.2% of Australians. The forum also highlighted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statistical costs and violence/trauma of alcohol abuse are highest in the 18-21 age group.</li> <li>• Research comparing Washington State (USA) and Victoria (Aust) suggests age 21 is a key difference in drinking level trends. They are lower in Washington State than in Victoria.</li> <li>• There is a trend for increasing support for MLDA21 – including growing numbers of abstinence in secondary schools.</li> </ul> <p>Shane Varcoe provided confronting statistics on alcohol related harms. For comprehensive information go to <a href="http://www.21bethere.org.au">www.21bethere.org.au</a></p>

<p>Will the government seriously consider raising the drinking age, because it will lose the alcohol tax revenue from the 18-21 age group?</p>	<p>In 2013 the South Australian Parliament has been actively considering making this change. The burden of disease and cost to the community through alcohol addiction, road accidents, loss of productivity in the workplace, violence and family breakdown surpass the tax revenue raised. We know what the expenditures are. They would be reduced. But we need to do more work on revenues. We believe that the government economically better off. This will need further investigation. Are there any other stats from the US or other countries to provide an indicator?</p>
<p>Will night time economies suffer if the 18-21 demographic is excluded? i.e. will less venues be open and employment suffer? What about sporting sponsorship?</p>	<p>Raising the drinking age will not exclude the 18-21 demographic. The night time economy will change and diversify in positive directions. It will be as vibrant with less violence on the streets. Indicators from the United States are that the entertainment precincts do well without alcohol use under 21. They are certainly safer.</p>
<p>What about the revenue gained by sporting clubs – i.e. community football clubs?</p>	<p>Evidence from the ‘Good Sports’ program that when harmful use of alcohol is removed clubs are more viable, and broaden their support base. Raising the drinking age will reduce youth alcohol misuse and thereby make it easier for sports clubs to conduct their core business.</p>
<p>Should there be more education in schools? Are we offering the information provided at the forum to high schools?</p>	<p>While education is necessary, alone it is not sufficient. A combination of education, pricing and legislation will assist the dissemination of the message of alcohol harms. More support to NGO’s such as Dalgarno would take the message into more schools.</p>
<p>Is there a way to ‘plant a seed’ about being ‘alcohol-free’ as with smoking/Quit campaign which worked on incremental change?</p>	<p>Trials as in ‘smoking ban’ scenario could help to answer these concerns and be emulated. People objected to smoking bans at first. Information and education + legislation effected the change needed.</p>
<p>How can we get the not-for-profits on board?</p>	<p>We need to increase the numbers of these in the conversation. The 21 Be There consortium is growing with the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) now on board, and with but Ita Buttrose (2013 Australian of the Year and vocal public supporter of this cause</p>
<p>Young people (18) entering the armed services and going off to war, obtaining a driving licence and being able to vote, object to being excluded from the right to drink alcohol legally.</p>	<p>This argument is misguided as at age 18 young people remains more biologically vulnerable to alcohol than mature adults. Research shows that when all states in Australia lowered the drinking age from 21 down to 18 in the early 1970’s youth alcohol-related deaths increased by over 10%. The result is that more than 1000 young people have now die or been seriously injured due to the lowering of drinking age, more than has been exacted on youth in Australia’s wars. The Australian Defence Force is struggling with youth immaturity and alcohol problems and would be better able to fulfil its mission if the drinking age were raised. The USA accepts ages for different adult rights. 16 driving; 18 for voting and the</p>

	armed forces; 21 for alcohol use.
What are the secondary supply laws in South Australia?	They are very weak and need tightening up. For instance according to DASSA, 'a minor can drink legally in their own home or someone else's regardless of whether an adult legal guardian is present'. AND – they can drink in public places that are not licensed, regulated or dry areas (eg. A family picnic or barbecue in a park) provided they are in the company of an adult legal guardian or spouse.
We need for information to support parents	Professor Toumbourou's team recently published findings from a randomised trial of a secondary school intervention. Parents were encouraged to set firm rules not to supply or allow adolescent alcohol use. The intervention achieved a 25% reduction in adolescent binge drinking. Educating parents and youth is important as they have little knowledge of standard drinks or the latest drinking guidelines and secondary supply laws. However, while education is necessary, public health experience shows that it is most effective when reinforced with legislation.