



Foundation for Alcohol
Research & Education

Level 1,
40 Thesiger Court
Deakin ACT 2600

PO Box 19
Deakin West ACT 2600

T 02 6122 8600
F 02 6232 4400

www.fare.org.au

ABN 91 096 854 385

21 October 2016

The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP
Prime Minister
PO Box 6500
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister

PREVENTING ALCOHOL-RELATED FAMILY VIOLENCE

It is disappointing that the role of alcohol continues to be neglected in the ongoing family violence narrative, and once again I fear it will not be adequately addressed in the upcoming COAG National Summit on reducing violence against women and their children.

Australians pay too high a price for violence against women and their children, with an estimated \$13.6 billion impact to the economy as well as tremendous intangible costs to the physiological and psychological wellbeing of victims.^{1,2} Furthermore, these impacts are likely to transmit across generations, compounding the already high toll of family violence. Therefore, prevention is paramount in stemming the scourge of family violence and safeguarding the future for Australian families.

Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia (Change the Story) has promoted the importance of addressing factors such as, “alcohol and other drugs, childhood exposure to violence, mental health and wellbeing, economic disadvantage, social exclusion, racism and other forms of discrimination”³ in order to accomplish positive change. However, there are few policy interventions under consideration by Australian governments that adequately address these significant factors. Of concern, one jurisdiction, New South Wales, is considering relaxing restrictions on the sale of packaged liquor, which will in all likelihood increase the number of family violence incidents. Such a decision would fly in the face of evidence showing earlier bottle shop closing times reduces the level of harm.

Alcohol is a significant risk factor for family violence, responsible for between 23 to 65 per cent of domestic incidents reported to police and between 15 to 47 per cent of child abuse cases reported in Australia.⁴ More than a third of intimate partner homicides involve alcohol consumption by the perpetrator.⁵

Unfortunately, government plans have neither adequately acknowledged alcohol’s involvement in family violence, nor embraced strategies to address the issue. Even Change the Story, while noting the intersection of alcohol and family violence, neglects to put forward recommendations for policy

interventions to address alcohol-related family violence, except in the context of gender inequality. This heavy emphasis on gender inequality is excluding recourse to policy change that will reduce risk and prevent violence.

Despite vigorous advocacy efforts by my Foundation and other stakeholders, we expect to be further disheartened by the continuing lack of attention to alcohol in the *Third Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*. I imagine those concerned about other contributing factors, such as mental health, social exclusion, and economic disadvantage are similarly pessimistic.

In 2015, FARE developed a *National framework for action to prevent alcohol-related family violence* (Framework). The Framework proposes policies and programs that all Australian governments can implement and which will have a tangible impact on reducing and preventing family violence. The Framework has received commendation by the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee's Final Report into *Domestic Violence in Australia*, which included a specific recommendation that the Commonwealth Government considers FARE's Framework as part of efforts to reduce the role of alcohol as a contributing factor in family violence.⁶

Many interventions designed to reduce alcohol consumption across Australia can be enacted swiftly and at low cost, resulting in immediate reductions in family violence. The continual disregard for such compelling evidence and advice on the inclusion of alcohol-related policies and interventions in family violence strategies represents an oversight that could sustain and increase the suffering of women and children. In the words of former Senator Nova Peris OAM, "A domestic violence strategy that does not even mention alcohol is not worth the paper it is written on."⁷

The National Summit provides the opportunity for governments across the country to commit to real action to reduce and prevent family violence. I urge you not to overlook the role of alcohol, and other significant contributing factors such as mental health, as part of the solution.

These solutions begin with reforming the alcohol taxation system, reducing the physical availability of alcohol, and removing the sexualisation of women in alcohol advertisements. Addressing these factors will demonstrate real leadership and improve the safety of women and children across Australia.

Yours sincerely



MICHAEL THORN
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

¹ National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children. (2009). *The cost of violence against women and their children*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

² Dunkley, A. & Phillips, J. (2015). *Domestic violence in Australia: A quick guide to the issues*. Parliamentary Library, Research Paper Series, 2014-2015. Canberra: Parliament of Australia.

³ Our Watch, VicHealth, ANROWS. (2015). *Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*. P.57.

⁴ Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education. (2015). *National Framework for action to prevent alcohol-related family violence*. Canberra: Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education.

⁵ Cussen, T. & Bryant, W. (2015). *Domestic/family homicide in Australia*. Research in Practice No 38. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

⁶ The Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee. (2015). *Domestic violence in Australia*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

⁷ Peris, N. (29 September 2014). *Protecting the right to drink trumps the safety of Indigenous women in the NT*. The Guardian.
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/29/protecting-the-right-to-drink-trumps-the-safety-of-indigenous-women-in-the-nt>