# Australia, an intoxicated society: 40 Years on from the Baume Report

## Researcher

1. Nicole Lim, Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education

## Summary

Forty years ago, a progressive and prescient Senate Committee report identified alcohol and its harms as a problem of epidemic proportions. In 1977 the Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare released its report, *Drug Problems in Australia – an intoxicated society?* The report is often referred to as the Baume Report since the Committee was chaired by Peter Baume, a physician and then Senator for New South Wales (NSW).

This study provides a high-level overview of progress made over the last 40 years against the report’s 37 alcohol specific recommendations. The study finds a majority of the recommendations remain relevant today, even though Australia has greatly changed over these 40 years. These include changes in our understanding of alcohol and the nature of harm, changed patterns of drinking, and broader societal, legislative and economic developments within and beyond the realm of alcohol.

## Outcomes

FARE’s analysis of the Baume report grouped the report’s 37 alcohol specific recommendations into eight policy intervention areas, and found progress made only in one of the eight – the area of drink driving. Of the 13 drink driving related recommendations, some progress has been made against all of these, with eight implemented in full including the introduction of random breath testing and alcohol interlocks.

In examining the progress made against the landmark report’s recommendations, the study found that despite substantive progress on drink driving, Governments have failed over the last four decades to make any significant headway in implementing effective alcohol policy to tackle the price, promotion and availability of alcohol.

It was also discovered that many of the strong recommendations made in 1977 could in fact be lifted from alcohol policy submissions put forward today; with very little or no progress on the recommendations relating to the price, promotion and availability of alcohol; the three policy interventions proven most effective in reducing alcohol harm.

## Recommendations

The evidence is clear about what works to reduce alcohol harm. This includes the implementation of population-level interventions aimed at addressing the price, promotion and availability of alcohol, as well as more targeted interventions aimed at addressing particular risk factors and/or specific population groups. The success of progress against the drink driving related recommendations also provides lessons that can be applied to other areas. To effectively reduce harm, strong political leadership is required with effective coordination and integration across relevant agencies. A comprehensive package of measures must be implemented that includes both national- and jurisdiction-level evidence-driven strategies, strong legislation with effective enforcement, and hard-hitting public awareness campaigns.

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