# More than two years on, two recommendations of the Jenkins Review remain unresolved

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More than two-and-a-half years after the[Jenkins Review](https://maps.finance.gov.au/circulars/independent-review-commonwealth-parliamentary-workplaces-report) was released, there are two outstanding recommendations from the 28 handed down by former Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Kate Jenkins.

One is a policy on alcohol. The other is the establishment of an Independent Parliamentary Standards Commission to enforce a behavioural code of conduct for all staff, with consequences for breaches.

As [The Saturday Paper’s chief political correspondent, Karen Barlow observed](https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/7am/id1461999702?i=1000657911370), “They are the two pieces of reform that directly impact on MP and senator behaviour – the amount of alcohol that flows through the building, and the enforcement of a code of conduct for serious complaints.”

The [Set the Standard report](https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ahrc_set_the_standard_2021.pdf) into behaviour at Parliament House found there was a “work hard, play hard” culture which involved “unsafe drinking” that “fostered environments where sexual harassment or sexual assault could occur.”

One of the recommendations of the review was to “develop and implement comprehensive alcohol policies, including measures to support policies.”

On the face of it, this doesn’t seem to be a difficult task, and as the review also points out “alcohol policies in Australian workplaces are increasingly common as a key workplace strategy to address and reduce alcohol-related harm.”

People who had worked in Parliament had raised concerns about the availability of alcohol, the blurring effect of alcohol on personal and professional boundaries, its connection to work opportunities and its impact on health and wellbeing.

People also raised that alcohol had contributed to their experiences of bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault.

The way that alcohol flows through Parliament is well known.

The people employed in the building often work around the clock and are in a culture where drinking “to blow off steam” is.” Is the norm.’

Networking and socialising is strongly encouraged and seen as a part of the job, and much of this is done over alcohol.

As one person shared, “One of the key reasons that I think politics was such a destructive and unproductive, and just inappropriate workplace for an 18 year old to begin with, was how quickly I was plied with alcohol, and how integral alcohol was to socialising.

Every function, every event, alcohol consumption is basically unlimited, unmonitored, and encouraged, often provided for free. All socialising happened over alcohol.”

It is also common for lobbyists and companies to host lavish functions where politicians and advisors are plied with alcohol.

As one person shared, “After 5:00 pm, all the various lobby groups, the interest groups, they all come to Parliament, and there’s about a dozen functions on every sitting night across the building. All of these functions, the catering, and the alcohol, is fully paid for by the interest group…you would go, you would turn up to one function…and they’re talking, they’re plying all their products. And at the back there’s an open bar, and it’s free, and it’s unlimited. And then you go to the next function…and then you continue drinking.”

Indeed, the Australian Hotels Association held one such event in the building on the same day that a senior politician was filmed lying on the footpath in Canberra appearing to be intoxicated.

The failure to address a culture in which alcohol is used as a coping mechanism in a pressure cooker work environment, and where high stress, bullying and harassment are accepted, is a major safety concern.

And yet, when people drink at higher risk levels and behave in ways that would see them lose their jobs in almost any other workplace across the country, there are no clear courses of action in our nation’s Parliament.

If we want this to change, we need Members of Parliament to lead by example. We must see the last two recommendations from the Set the Standard report fully implemented.

Decisions that affect the lives of all Australians should not be made while people are under the influence of alcohol. Above all, we must ensure that everyone is safe in their workplace.