

Media Release

ZERO BAC LIMIT FOR DRIVERS UNDER 25

12 March 2013: A proposal to introduce a zero blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limit for all drivers under 25 years is one of 28 recommendations to a Government Inquiry currently examining strategies to reduce alcohol abuse among young people in New South Wales (NSW).

The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) has also called for a clampdown on all alcohol promotions in all NSW on and off licence premises, an end to alcohol industry sponsorship of university clubs and sporting teams, and the re-establishment of key youth programs axed by the Government last year.

In its submission to the *Inquiry into strategies to reduce alcohol abuse among young people in NSW*, FARE has criticised the State Government for an ad hoc approach that ignores evidence-based solutions and fails to protect young people in NSW.

To strengthen measures to prevent young people from drink driving, FARE has recommended that the zero BAC limit currently in place for learner and provisional licence holders be extended to all drivers in NSW under 25 years of age.

In 2011, 21 per cent of all drivers and motorcycle riders involved in fatal crashes were aged 17 to 25 years old, despite that age group only accounting for 14 per cent of license holders.

FARE Chief Executive, Michael Thorn says inexperience behind the wheel and youth drinking is a recipe for disaster.

“Young people are disproportionately represented in road fatalities. Australian research tells us that new drivers are three times more likely than experienced drivers to be injured in a crash if they have been drinking alcohol. Research both here and abroad also tells us that a zero BAC for all drivers under 25 years would save lives and reduce the road toll significantly,” Mr Thorn said.

FARE has also urged the Government to ensure that NSW higher education students, the majority of whom are under 25 years old, are not forgotten.

FARE has recommended that the Government encourage universities to discourage or prohibit the sponsorship of student associations, clubs and societies by licenced venues and alcohol companies, and called for better regulation of liquor licence approvals in order to minimise the density of outlets and outlet trading hours in university precincts.

Australian research shows that 90 per cent of university students consume alcohol, with one in three drinking at risky levels. Those harms extend beyond the drinker and include interpersonal and sexual violence, and costs to the institution such as student attrition and property damage.

A recent Australian study examined the extent of those harms, finding one in five students have had their sleep or study interrupted by other alcohol-affected students and one in nine students have experienced unwanted sexual advances from students affected by alcohol.

Mr Thorn says focussing on the drinking behaviours and environments of NSW higher education students affords the NSW Government an opportunity to target a significant population of young people, but stresses that University Councils have a pivotal role to play.

"Heavy drinking has long been part and parcel of Australian universities, but responsibility for dismantling such a pervasive and enduring alcohol-fuelled campus culture falls not only to the State Government but to the University Councils as well. We continue to see irresponsible alcohol promotions pushing excessive quantities of alcohol onto vulnerable youth. It's happening on the University Council's watch, on their grounds and to their students and it's time the universities acted," Mr Thorn said.

FARE's submission comes ahead of this week's 2013 NSW Alcohol Summit at NSW Parliament House in Sydney on Thursday 14 March at 9:30am.

Hosted by the NSW ACT Alcohol Policy Alliance (NAAPA), the Summit will bring health professionals, community representative, law enforcement officials, researchers and frontline workers together with Government and opposition MP's to examine solutions to reduce alcohol harms ten years on from the 2003 Alcohol Summit.

Michael Thorn is available for interview.

Media Contact: Jeremy Henderson 0425 559 710

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) FARE is an independent, charitable organisation working to prevent the harmful use of alcohol in Australia. Since 2001, FARE has invested over \$115 million in research and community projects to minimise the impact of alcohol misuse on Australians. Through its national grants program and commissioned research, FARE has established itself as a leading voice on alcohol and other drugs issues. FARE works with community groups, all levels of government, police, emergency workers, research institutions and the private sector to address alcohol-related problems. For further information visit FARE's website: www.fare.org.au