



# National Committee for Addiction Treatment

FACT SHEET

SEPTEMBER 2009

## Alcohol treatment - time to prioritise

Alcohol misuse is a serious problem in New Zealand.

The Law Commission's alcohol law review paints a sorry picture of the widespread, considerable and ongoing damage to self and the community caused by alcoholics, the alcohol-dependant and those occasionally affected by alcohol.

However with successful or even partial treatment people affected by alcohol, often talented and resourceful, will stop causing damage and costing society, and become significant contributors instead.



District Court Judges told the Law Commission they have "grave concerns about the absence of assessment facilities and programmes to which they can refer people who appear in front of them."

NCAT believes now is the opportune time to re-evaluate the priority assigned to alcohol treatment and to forge ahead with positive and innovative changes that will result in an extensive array of well-resourced and effective alcohol treatment services.

It's time to prioritise alcohol treatment in its own right and not just see it as part of the purview of mental health or other health services.

### ALCOHOL IN OUR LIVES

Alcohol affects all our lives. Those interested in alcohol addiction treatment can download Alcohol in Our Lives from [www.lawcom.govt.nz](http://www.lawcom.govt.nz) and read the key findings and recommendations on pages 206-208 and page 241.

The Law Commission's recommendations include:

- Provide centres to temporarily supervise individuals not charged with an offence.
- Require assessment and treatment be taken into account during sentencing.
- Develop the workforce to ensure assessment, referral and brief interventions can be delivered by appropriate professionals across sectors.
- Investigate the range of alcohol-specific treatment interventions available to determine gap.
- Increase funding via the alcohol levy.
- Fund primary care providers to deliver screening, brief interventions and referrals to specialist treatment.
- Investigate using electronic screening and brief interventions where possible.
- Monitor/compare the prevalence of alcohol use disorders and the delivery of screening, brief interventions, and referrals in primary care and emergency departments.

*"Indeed, the costs that the excess use of alcohol imposes on society through law and order costs, health costs, accident compensation costs and individual harm costs are high...the consequences of harmful drinking affect us all."*

Alcohol in Our Lives, page iv

### PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH

NCAT believes that public health initiatives such as the 5+ solutions put forward by Alcohol Action New Zealand [www.alcoholaction.co.nz](http://www.alcoholaction.co.nz) can support targeted treatment interventions.

## OVERARCHING TREATMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- The social cost of alcohol to society is \$5.3 billion per year.
- 70% of those presenting for substance related treatment identify alcohol as their main problem.
- 5% of all drinkers suffer alcohol dependence. A large proportion of alcohol abuse and dependence is concentrated in socio-economically disadvantaged groups including prison populations.
- Māori are significantly over represented in alcohol statistics.
- A very large number of drinkers suffer adverse consequences of their use.
- 70% of court appearances are related to alcohol.
- Alcohol dependence can be treated.
- Treatment works for individuals, families, whanau and for society.
- Fewer than 0.5% of all drinkers receive treatment.
- Alcohol dependence is curable without medication or ongoing treatment BUT alcoholism is a relapsing condition.
- It is estimated that for every dollar spent on interventions at least four dollars are saved in total social costs.
- While in-prison treatment works it must be coupled with reintegration interventions to be truly effective.

## ALCOHOL TREATMENT CHALLENGES

Access to treatment is a significant issue because it is the point of first contact and a 'window of opportunity' when an individual's motivation to undergo treatment is at its greatest.<sup>1</sup>

However:

- Only \$100 million for treatment is applied to this \$5.3 billion alcohol problem.
- The Government's approach to funding treatment is fragmented.
- The alcohol treatment sector's voice has struggled to be heard above the voices of family health, mental health and health in general.
- There aren't enough treatment workers to meet current and rising demand. Workforce development is therefore an important investment in future capacity.

*"You know it was the first time anything really clicked for me. I talked through the questionnaire and thought, 'I've actually got a problem with my drinking.' It really changed the way I thought. It was only then that I was able to find some help."*

Nick

## CONSTRUCTIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

### Funding

- Increase funding by \$50m per year for next three years.
- Fund primary care interventions as a priority.
- Increase funding for Māori-specific services especially within inter social agency settings.
- Offer broad-based funding streams and challenge addiction treatment organisations to offer comprehensive, cost-effective solutions that meet the national demand for treatment across all sectors.

### Increase availability of services

- Enhance alcohol intervention options available within criminal justice services.
- Increase the availability of detoxification services nationally.
- Increase access to residential treatment beds nationally.
- Make alcohol and drug treatment options available through all social agencies.
- Ensure treatment is available for all levels of problematic alcohol use.
- Offer specific family, whanau support and treatment across all agencies and services.
- Focus on the frontline. Put clinicians in front of clients.

### Workforce

- Develop the workforce to deliver a broad range of innovative and flexible assessment and intervention initiatives wherever needed, and not just in Alcohol and Other Drug settings.

### Innovate

- Create a formal interagency contractual framework that supports integrated treatment delivery.
- Investigate the use of online assessment, screening and intervention tools.
- Develop practical, sensible treatment options for young people.
- Complete the review of the Alcoholism & Drug Addiction Act 1966 to clarify its purpose.

The National Committee on Addiction Treatment supports the clear messages on treatment for alcohol problems as highlighted in Alcohol In Our Lives. This paper proposes a number of initiatives to meet the challenges raised by that report.

References 1. Rout: Improving Access to Alcohol and Drug Treatment, Oct. 09



National Committee  
for Addiction Treatment

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