



26 October 2018

NT News

Dear Editor,

Re: Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) response to minimum unit price article

The Riley Review, which was commissioned by the NT Government last year, highlighted just how unhealthy the drinking culture in the NT has become. As a consequence we hold a long list of unenviable records, including the highest levels of both alcohol related hospitalisations and deaths in Australia.

The recommendations that were put forward in this Review and the Government's willingness to accept them, has the potential to transform the NT to becoming a national leader. Therefore, it is imperative that false assertions put forward by the liquor industry, which seek to protect their own vested interests, do not go unchallenged.

In Thursday's online edition of the NT News, you ran a story titled 'International study suggests NT Government relied on flawed science to justify alcohol floor price.' In this article Retail Drinks Australia Chief Executive, Ms Jenny Ryan, was extensively quoted, and the article implied that a study published in the *European Journal of Health Economics*, had concluded that there was no evidence to support a minimum unit price (MUP) on alcohol.

The selective quoting from Retail Drinks Australia in this article not only ignores the overwhelming evidence base that already exists supporting the effectiveness of MUP, but it also misrepresents the findings from the study. As highlighted by the study, even a "small proportional reduction in consumption amongst heavy drinkers could still have a large effect in terms of health and healthcare costs."

As surgeons we are very aware of the devastating effect of heavy alcohol consumption on the lives of Territorians. Misuse of alcohol is strongly implicated in our high rates of injury due to interpersonal violence, road traffic accidents and family violence. It is also responsible for our high rate of deaths from alcohol related diseases including cancers, liver disease and the heartbreaking lifelong disability that results from foetal alcohol syndrome. Daily, we deal face to face with the trauma that alcohol misuse generates.

Alcohol misuse exposes all Territorians to increased risk injury and death. There are increased costs of policing, legal and prison systems, medical and rehabilitation services which are borne by the whole community. Family and social breakdown due to alcohol misuse sets up social dysfunction that can affect Territory families and their communities for generations

We recognise that the consumption of alcohol is an integral part of our lifestyle and can contribute to the quality and enjoyment of life. We also acknowledge that each of us have the right to make personal decisions about the amount of alcohol we purchase and consume. As medical professionals we are very aware this is not a level playing field. Skilful advertising and the aggressive promotional techniques of alcohol by the liquor industry is not done with the primary intent to increase the wellbeing of Territorians.

Maximising good and minimising harm for the whole population is however the primary responsibility of our elected government. The current stand of the Territory government in balancing commercial interests with the overall wellbeing of Territorians is to be applauded.

Yours sincerely,

Associate Professor Phill Carson; Councillor, RACS

Dr John Crozier; RACS Trauma Chair

Mr Mahiban Thomas; Chair NT Regional Committee, RACS