
Benjamin Riordan, Tamlin Conner, Jayde Flett, Damian Scarf

Andy Ellis’s kick found touch in the 80th minute to win the 2011 Rugby World Cup final. Four years on and rather than kicking alcohol into touch, our government continues to pass legislation that keeps it in the field of play. Case in point is the recent amendment made to the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act (2012), that will allow licenced premises to open and sell alcohol during the Rugby World Cup 2015 matches. Far from sneaking through, and despite a large number of submissions from individuals in the health sector (eg, New Zealand Medical Association, Public Health Association of New Zealand, The National Public Health Alcohol Working Group), and various other groups (eg, Alcohol Action Tai Tokerau, National Community Action on Youth and Drugs, Waitakere Anti Violence Essential Services, Women’s Refuge), the bill passed with overwhelming support (99 For vs 21 Against). Specifically, the bill allows bars, pubs, and licensed clubs to open and sell alcohol an hour before the start of a match, during the match, and for half an hour after the match ends. On nights with multiple matches played in succession, licensed premises will be able to continue selling alcohol between matches, provided that the second match starts less than an hour after the first. This will allow licensed premises to open well outside of normal operating hours and may lead to an increase in both alcohol use and alcohol-related harm. The aim of the current piece is to lay out in clear detail how wrong-footed the government’s game plan really is.

In their submission, the New Zealand Medical Association made it clear that restricting trading hours is one of the few measures that reduces alcohol use and the harms associated with it. Indeed, in a review of the literature, Hahn, et al (2010), demonstrated that increasing trading times by just 2 hours led to a significant increase in alcohol-related harm. But, even small changes appear detrimental. For example, in central Amsterdam, extending trading hours from 4am to 5am led to a 34% increase in ambulance attendances for alcohol-related harm. A similar increase in Norway led to a 16% increase in violent crime. Conversely, and closer to home, reducing trading hours in parts of Australia led to a decrease in assaults.

To add to the concern, and in contrast to the studies mentioned above, our government's relaxed trading hours coincide with our country's major sport event. While the government appears to think that this is the perfect time to relax trading hours, one could argue it is the perfect time to do the exact opposite. Unsurprisingly, events are associated with an increase in alcohol use and alcohol-related harm. Although we are unaware of any research focusing on the increase in New Zealanders drinking during the World Cup, there was a marked increase in alcohol-related emergency...
department presentations during the 2011 World Cup. In other event-related contexts in New Zealand, we have found that individuals consume around 200% more alcohol during events relative to the amount they drink during a standard drinking session.6,7 To conclude, the government's previous inaction with regard to alcohol reform was concerning enough, the fact that their most recent action may increase alcohol use and alcohol-related harm, is nothing short of alarming.

**REFERENCES:**


