



Health Coalition Aotearoa

10 April 2020

Open letter to the Government of Aotearoa New Zealand

Prime Minister Right Hon Jacinda Ardern
Cc Minister for Economic Development Hon Phil Twyford
Cc Minister of Health Hon Dr David Clark
Cc Minister for Children Hon Tracy Martin
Cc Minister for Police Hon Stuart Nash
Cc Andrew Little, Minister of Justice
Cc Poto Williams, Associate Minister Social Development
Jan Logie, Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Minister of Justice (Domestic and Sexual Violence Issues)

Stop online alcohol sales during lockdown to protect whānau, particularly children

The Health Coalition Aotearoa is calling on the Government of Aotearoa New Zealand to stop online sales of alcohol during this national emergency and lock down period. This will protect our health system and mental health, reduce family harm, and foster positive coping mechanisms in our country.

Home isolation places many New Zealanders, particularly women and children, vulnerable to family harm. There are signs of an increase in family violence during the first two weeks of lockdown as increasing stress and the subsequent economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic hit home.

Alcohol exacerbates family harm. New Zealand research clearly demonstrates that alcohol plays a role in our shameful domestic violence statistics, by increasing its likelihood and severity.¹ This can have lifelong impacts on our children that extend well beyond the COVID-19 lockdown, including the effect of exposure to violence in the early years of life on brain development.²

Reducing alcohol availability is recommended by the World Health Organization to curb the harm from family violence.³ Allowing online alcohol sales during lockdown is very likely to increase alcohol accessibility, consumption and harm, and may increase inequities in harm from alcohol. The Crown's Treaty of Waitangi obligations demand that Māori health and

wellbeing is protected and the disproportionate and unequal harm done by alcohol among Māori must be addressed.

We applaud the government's focus on wellbeing at the heart of policy making. New Zealand's leadership in protecting its citizens from coronavirus is internationally recognised and widely appreciated at home. The government have taken extraordinary measures to prioritise the nation's health. However, online access to spirits does not support this policy.

The Coalition is asking that online alcohol sales not be listed as an essential business alongside necessities such as food, medicine, healthcare, energy, fuel, waste-removal, internet and financial support.

The availability of beer, wine and cider from supermarkets and grocery stores is sufficient for people who might be affected by restricted access to spirits. Mandated limits on the quantities of alcohol available for purchase at supermarkets are also appropriate. We understand there are commercial pressures on government from the retailers of spirits, but we ask the government to continue to prioritise people's wellbeing ahead of these commercial pressures.

Every effort must be taken to prevent the widening of inequities in alcohol harm during this national emergency. Suspending online alcohol sales for the remaining lockdown and future partial lockdown will support this effort.

Signed,



Professor Sally Casswell

On behalf of the Interim Board of Health Coalition Aotearoa

References

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- ¹ Connor, J. L., Kypri, K., Bell, M. L., & Cousins, K. (2011). Alcohol involvement in aggression between intimate partners in New Zealand: a national cross-sectional study. *BMJ Open* 2011;1:e000065..
 - ² Enlow MB, Egeland B, Blood EA, Wright RO, Wright RJ. Interpersonal trauma exposure and cognitive development in children to age 8 years: A longitudinal study. *J Epidemiol Community Health* 2012; 66: 1005–1010.
 - ³ World Health Organization. Intimate Partner Violence and Alcohol Fact Sheet. (n.d.) https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/factsheets/ft_intimate.pdf