Reviewer's report

Title: A review of public opinion towards alcohol controls in Australia

Version: 1 Date: 21 September 2010

Reviewer: Norman Giesbrecht

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A very interesting paper on a topic that is always timely since public opinion, or perceived public opinion, seems to be an important factor in alcohol policy deliberations.

Several suggestions/comments emerged.

1. The presentation seems to be based on the assumption that response options for all the questions were binary - yes/no, support/not support. However, the surveys likely varied in whether the respondents were offered two options, or asked to choose from a scale of four or more. The authors could add a column to their tables indicating this variation across studies.

2. Did any of the studies document the level of knowledge of the respondents on the policy issues that they were asked to offer an opinion on? It is feasible that many respondents were not aware of what the current guidelines or regulations are and this had a potential impact on their answers.

3. Previous studies have shown that support varies by drinking pattern, age and gender. These differences are greater for interventions/policies that are universal, such as pricing, and less so for focused intervention such as enhanced efforts to curtail service to intoxicated patrons. This variation by drinking level/pattern and demographic status might have been examined, even if not all of the 21 studies presented that data. The alcohol industry and governments in favour of increasing access to alcohol have at times referred to greater convenience, customer service and so on in support of relaxing controls or increasing promotion. But advocates fail to mention that greatest support comes from those sectors who are at greatest risk of alcohol-related harm due to high-risk drinking habits and therefore actually 'lose' with greater access.

4. The three questions addressed in this paper are good ones. It would be a welcome addition to provide a figure showing trend data illustrating the findings pertaining to these 3 questions.

5. Wording of questions is a critical point and the discussion of that is welcomed - as indicated in connection with the last question.

6. A substantial challenge is that of communicating the potential impact of a policy intervention. It is incorrectly assumed by many politicians, and fueled by the alcohol industry, that pricing increases impact moderate drinkers but not high risk drinkers or damage from alcohol, and therefore do not achieve substantial harm reduction goals. I think further research is needed to determine how the
policy options and research on public opinion can be best communicated to policy makers so that an accurate and succinct picture is provided.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.