



What the Alcohol Summit decided

The NSW Alcohol Summit was held at NSW Parliament House from 26-29 August. A summit is another name for a large conference, where different groups in the community discuss a topic and suggest ways the Government and other people can help to make things better.

The Alcohol Summit aimed to find out ways to reduce alcohol-related harm in NSW. Alcohol-related harm includes things such as health problems, injury, losing your job, violence and family breakdown.

At the Summit, young people joined alcohol experts, representatives of interest groups and the liquor industry, community leaders, and Members of Parliament to examine existing approaches to alcohol abuse and produce new ideas and solutions.

They talked about:

- Helping the community understand the impact of alcohol
- Using education and leadership to prevent alcohol-related harm
- Treating addiction to alcohol
- Treating diseases caused by alcohol
- Reducing injuries and accidents caused by alcohol
- Reducing alcohol-related problems in families
- Training for people who work on preventing or treating alcohol problems
- Reducing alcohol-related crime and anti-social behaviour
- Helping communities manage alcohol-related violence
- Safe ways to market, sell and serve alcohol

The Summit went on for four days and the 16 young delegates were involved in all sorts of ways, delivering speeches and participating in working group sessions.

At the end of the Summit, delegates decided what actions needed to be taken to reduce the effects of alcohol-related harm in NSW. They put them all together into a paper called a Communiqué, available at <http://www.alcoholsummit.nsw.gov.au/communique>.

Here are the main things that the Communiqué recommended to the Government about reducing alcohol-related harm to children and young people.

The Communiqué says that all programs for kids need to understand that it's normal for them to take risks and hang out with their friends. It also said that the best way to prevent kids being harmed by alcohol is for them to have good relationships with their families, friends, schools and communities.

Show adults how to be good role models

Find out more about how adults can be good role models, and then help them to be good role models. This could be achieved through education and information programs for parents about alcohol and its responsible use, and how to get help for alcohol abuse.

Teach parents about normal teenage development and behaviour, and how to give their kids information about alcohol.

Show teachers and school counsellors how to recognise signs of alcohol abuse in their students.

Help parents understand how their behaviour affects their kids' attitudes about alcohol. Parents could have peer support groups where they encourage each other to drink responsibly, then show their kids how to do so.

Offer special support to newly-arrived migrant families from different cultures who have different views on alcohol.

Promote bilingual drug and alcohol counsellors to students in secondary and tertiary education.

Show parents how to protect their kids from alcohol-related harm

Help families work out ways to protect their kids from alcohol misuse, by giving parents more advice on:

- how to stop misusing alcohol themselves
- how to sit down with their kids and talk about end of year parties and alcohol supply at parties
- how to help kids make wise choices about alcohol
- how to give teenagers information about alcohol that will actually help
- how to deal with a problem drinker in the family

Educate adults about not giving alcohol to kids, either at home or in public places.

Educate parents of 0-5 year old children about the risks of them drowning while their carers are drinking.

Help parents host parties safely. Give them a 'Safe Party Kit' and make it useful for people from all cultural backgrounds.

Get police to consider fining adults who give alcohol to kids at private parties, particularly when parties get out of hand.

Have an effective education campaign about alcohol, like the education campaigns in the past for seat belts ('click, clack, front and back') and skin cancer ('slip, slop, slap').

Use schools to educate parents and students about alcohol

Use schools to:

- introduce education about alcohol in primary school
- involve students in planning, implementing and evaluating alcohol education
- give students realistic and correct information about alcohol and drinking including road safety and the risk of alcohol abuse
- connect young people with drinking problems to specialist people who can help them (like specialist youth workers who are trained in drug and alcohol counselling)
- help them plan safe end-of-year parties

Encourage students to stay at school by making it more attractive to them so that they want to come to school and learn, rather than drop out prior to Year 12.

Use schools as a way to reach parents and kids. Make them like a community centre where parents can come along and get help in parenting and other support services. Involve parents and students, and use schools and homes as places to learn.

Make sure schools don't break the law when they have alcohol in fundraising activities that involve under-18s.

Target education to specific groups, like teenage boys, who might be vulnerable to binge drinking.

Teach students about what they should do when a friend has had too much to drink. Make sure the PDHPE syllabus includes basic first aid and understanding about standard drinks.

The media should promote safe drinking

Make TV ads that use shock tactics to discourage kids from drinking alcohol and/or stopping those who drink heavily.

Target popular shows that kids watch, like soapies, to influence story lines about alcohol that impact on young people in a positive way.

Have media campaigns aimed at reducing the Australian custom of binge drinking, and aim these campaigns at kids.

Think about making alcohol companies include health warnings on the packaging of alcohol products.

Alcohol companies should follow the rules

Consider making alcohol companies follow rules about promoting alcohol in television programs, internet sites, newspapers, magazines, sporting events and advertising.

Start a retailer alert system so that places that sell alcohol know when alcohol companies are advertising improperly. The bottle shop would then take the product off the shelves until the company stopped these ads.

Make alcohol companies set aside a percentage of their advertising budget for activities that reduce the harm caused by alcohol misuse.

Drinking and sport don't go together

Get sporting stars to promote non-drinking and responsible drinking by their own example.

Encourage the sponsors of sporting events to promote safe drinking and healthy lifestyles.

Think about banning alcohol companies sponsoring motor sports and underage events.

Ask the Institutes who train junior athletes to teach them about responsible drinking.



Kids need more things to do as an alternative to drinking

Have more accessible, cheap and safe entertainment and recreation activities, as an alternative to drinking.

Get local businesses, government and non-government agencies to sponsor more youth activities. This is especially important for kids in remote areas.

Provide Aboriginal cultural programs for Aboriginal kids (like bush camps, learning about ceremonies), using community facilities.

Get the message through to pubs, nightclubs and adults who host private parties that they need to also show that it is okay not to drink alcohol at all.

Kids need safer drinking environments

Make sure everyone understands that the police can help supervise private parties if they are called.

Discuss the possibility of creating supervised venues where young people can drink alcohol safely.

Kids with drinking problems need help that actually works

Start a specialist youth alcohol hotline which kids can ring for free, and get advice about how can help them in their area. Advertise the hotline so that young people will learn the number, so it becomes as well-known as Kids' Help Line.

Give kids with drinking problems the chance to talk to and get support from other kids who have been through similar experiences.

Give free training for people who would like to become alcohol counsellors. This would make it easier for more young people who have had personal experience of alcohol misuse and treatment to do the course.

Increase services like detox, rehab and refuges in rural areas that have known problems with alcohol. Have some services specifically for vulnerable groups, like kids without family support, or kids with both mental illness and alcohol addiction.

Design programs at youth services, that will make sure that kids who use the services can get specialist help for alcohol problems, and make sure that the youth services treat all problems that kids face, not just the alcohol ones.

Make sure young people with both mental illness and alcohol dependence can go to a single place to get help for everything, rather than having to go to lots of different places. This is especially needed in rural areas.

Write guidelines for doctors and other health professionals on how to be youth-friendly.

Make sure that young people's privacy and confidentiality is respected by people who work in services. Also, make sure young people are aware of their rights in relation to confidentiality.

Make sure that the lack of a Medicare card doesn't stop kids being able to get help.

Provide more services that are flexible, like youth workers who go to the young people on the streets, rather than waiting for them to turn up at a service.

Make sure school students are able see a specialist youth worker who is trained in alcohol abuse, as well as a school counsellor.

Improve kids' knowledge of alcohol counselling services by taking them on school excursions so they meet the workers face to face.

Have the different services visit schools, like having a 'Service Expo', so that kids can meet the workers face-to-face.

Change the laws

Review the alcohol laws concerning fines for kids buying, having and drinking alcohol.

Increase the fine for supplying alcohol to a minor on licensed premises from \$550 to \$2500.

Conduct a trial of increasing the fine for drinking illegally in an Alcohol Free Zone - from \$22 to \$220. Start it off in Cronulla, Bondi, Manly and inner Sydney.

Think about making the Blood Alcohol Content for 'L' and 'P' plate drivers 0.00. Make sure that young people under 25 have input into the idea.

Check whether existing laws allow police to pick up kids who are drunk and take them to safe houses where they can sleep it off, instead of putting them in police cells.

Have a trial of devices that you fit to the car that prevent you starting it up until you do a breath test and pass it. This trial would be for people convicted of drink driving.

Consider changing the alcohol taxes so that it is cheaper for people to buy low-alcohol drinks.

Make it harder for under-18s to get and buy alcohol, e.g:

- increase fines for drinking in an 'Alcohol Free Zone'
- the only ID that they can show at a bottle shop is an official government Proof of Age card, driver's licence or passport.

Improve relations between kids and police

Have more activities that give kids and police a chance to meet, like PCYC events or police Youth Liaison Officers going to talk at schools.

Help kids in trouble with the law

Help kids whose alcohol problems cause them to get in trouble with the law, so that they can get treatment for the drinking before they end up in a juvenile detention centre. If they are cautioned by the police, they should be sent to alcohol treatment or counselling at that time, rather than later.

Change the 'Youth Drug Court' to the 'Youth Drug and Alcohol Court' so that young people convicted of a crime while under the influence of alcohol can be sent into treatment instead of custody.

Give kids who are in juvenile detention treatment for drinking problems while they are in custody, as well as after they are released.

Have a trial of a Juvenile Release and Treatment Scheme in western NSW. This would mean that once kids get out of detention, a network of services would help them maintain the health, education, vocational and other gains they made in detention.

Try circle sentencing for Aboriginal kids who commit crimes when drunk. Circle sentencing is when someone convicted of a crime has their sentence decided at a meeting with members of their community, a magistrate, a counsellor and victims of the crime. They do their time in the community rather than in a gaol or juvenile detention centre.

Kids need more protection in public places

Urgently increase the number of places which will take in drunk adults and give them a bed, particularly in inner-city, rural and remote communities that do not already have these places. This could protect children from being hurt by a drunken adult they live with.

Increase funding for night patrols in areas where they are needed and make sure they run all night long. Night patrols are mobile youth services where youth workers or community members go out in a van, pick up kids who are in the streets and take them home. If they can't go home, they take them to a youth service where they are safe.

Have safe places (like a youth centre, refuge or activity centre) available for Aboriginal kids and others at risk of alcohol-related violence, especially in rural and remote areas. This is so that if their parent comes home drunk, they can go somewhere safe rather than just wandering around in the streets.

Have more women's refuges, especially in rural and remote areas, including refuges specially designed for Aboriginal women and children.

What happens next?

The Alcohol Summit gave its recommendations to the NSW Government at the end of the Summit.

The Government plans to say what it will do in response by Christmas 2003.

The Summit recommended that there be alcohol forums for young people, run by young people, aimed at finding local solutions to local problems. Also, it recommended that any youth-specific education or treatment programs must be designed with young people's input.

The Commission for Children and Young People expects there will be opportunities for young people to be involved in making things better in their local areas. We will keep you updated on what the Government decides to do and what it decides not to do.