

2 February 2018

Mr Jonathan Horton QC
The Independent Liquor & Gaming Authority
PO Box 8325
PARRAMATTA WESTFIELD
NSW 2150

Dear Mr Horton,

Submission to the Newcastle CBD Liquor Licence Conditions Review

Established in 1927, the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) is the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in Australia and New Zealand. RACS is a not-for-profit organisation representing more than 7,000 surgeons and 1,300 surgical trainees. Approximately 95 per cent of all surgeons practicing in Australia and New Zealand are Fellows of the College (FRACS).

RACS is committed to ensuring the highest standard of safe and comprehensive surgical and patient care for the communities it serves, and as part of this commitment, it strives to take informed and principled positions on issues of public health.

The RACS NSW Committee not only represents the College in NSW, but has the privilege of representing almost 1800 Fellows and 450 Trainees as well as a number of International Medical Graduates to key stakeholders throughout our state.

Firstly we wish to highlight our disappointment with the manner that this review was initially organised and are concerned that it will not be impartial. With the move of the closing date to 7 February 2018 we feel that all parties now have the opportunity to contribute to the discussion. We understand that the Australian Hotels Association of NSW (AHA NSW), which has a bias, not for public health but rather for its members, is responsible for prompting the review and the short notice for input following the announcement. This suggests that the Independent Liquor and Gaming Authority (ILGA) is contemplating the watering down of the high standards that have been set in the Newcastle area.

The timely release of data by the Australian College for Emergency Medicine (ACEM) highlighted the important and health focused work that has already been undertaken in NSW with regards to alcohol consumption in NSW. Data shows that NSW has the lowest percentage of alcohol related presentations to Emergency Departments across the whole of Australia.¹ The data also highlights the importance of positive measures, and the suggestion that these positive measures could be lifted or lightened, not only seems unreasonable but also dangerous to the public within Newcastle. According to the ACEM only 9.6 per cent of presentations are for alcohol related issues, where in other states and territories it rises to 19.4 per cent.

RACS Fellows, Trainees and International Medical Graduates regularly witness and have to address the impact of alcohol abuse, both acute and chronic, whether in the Emergency Department or through the illnesses resulting from long-term abuse. The impact on the patient, their immediate families and

the greater community is immense. In the RACS Position Paper “Alcohol Related Harm” 2016, the College states that “Alcohol misuse is a causal factor in more than 200 diseases and injury conditions, including cirrhosis of the liver, inflammation of the gut and pancreas, heart and circulatory problems, sleep disorders, male impotency, and eye disease. Excessive alcohol consumption also raises the overall risk of cancer, including cancer of the mouth, throat and oesophagus, liver cancer, breast cancer and bowel cancer.”².

As highlighted by Joanne McCarthy in the Herald newspaper “NEWCASTLE’S “last drinks” and “lockout” laws have led to a “significant and sustained” 31 per cent reduction in serious alcohol-related facial injury assault cases at John Hunter Hospital, a Hunter research team has found”³, the evidence for the excellent work that has been implemented and the resulting positive results, not just to individuals but to the whole community is self-evident. With regards to the “Terms of Reference” for review 5. a. we encourage you to look at the Newcastle area in comparison to other areas not just in NSW, but across the country and benchmark the high standard that is visible here making Newcastle a beacon for its care of community members.

We implore you to consider the value to the community, ultimately the people that have to deal with any watering down of the initiative. In conjunction with this the astronomical fiscal cost to society through long term healthcare, hospital admissions and police and justice interactions (these only being first-line costs), added to this is the social fiscal costs associated with the negative abuse of alcohol which need to be considered. “The total costs to society of alcohol-related problems in 2010 were estimated to be \$14,352b. Of this, \$2,958b (or 20.6 per cent) represents costs to the criminal justice system, \$1,686b (or 11.7 per cent) comprises costs to the health system, \$6,046b (or 42.1 per cent) involve costs to Australian productivity and \$3,662b (or 25.5 per cent) are costs associated with traffic accidents. This estimate of total costs however, does not incorporate the negative impacts on others (\$6,807b estimated by Laslett et al. 2010) associated with someone else’s drinking...”⁴ Everybody should have the right to social interaction and enjoyment but not at the cost of those around them.

To quote the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) “Alcohol is a significant contributor to family violence in Australia. In just one year (2011) there were 29,684 incidents of alcohol-related family violence in New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Alcohol-related family violence accounts for between 23 per cent and 65 per cent of all family violence incidents reported to police. Between 2002-03 and 2011-12, 36 per cent of perpetrators of intimate partner homicides used alcohol. Alcohol is also implicated in 15 to 47 per cent of child protection cases.”⁵ If you need reminding of the social impact of alcohol abuse within not just our communities but also our immediate families the statistics above should clearly justify measures for positive support of alcohol abusers, their families and their communities.

The fact that the NSW Police Association led “Last Drinks Coalition”, wrote to the Premier, Gladys Berejiklian with its concerns and initiated a petition, says that it is not only the health sector that is concerned over any watering down.

RACS NSW is also concerned that alcohol, like no other addictive drug, is associated with positive aspects of life e.g. sporting events, celebrations of all kinds and family life. Alcohol has always been a part of social life not just in Australia, but across the world, but time and again the impact of abuse and binge drinking has a near epidemic effect on the lives of those that are unfortunate enough to be in the vicinities (The Kings Cross and Newcastle experiences of physical attacks on innocent passers-by) or the families that have to pick up the pieces of lives destroyed either immediate or secondary.

Newcastle has created an environment that is reaping the rewards of safer environments, referring to the earlier piece in the Herald that highlighted that there is a 31 per cent reduction in serious alcohol-related facial injury assault cases at John Hunter Hospital. Newcastle is a beacon for the rest of Australia and if the opportunity is lost to promote the incredible work and results that have been achieved through watering down an effective initiative it is not only disappointing but dangerous.

Yours sincerely,



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Chair, Federal Trauma
Committee



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¹ Australian College for Emergency Medicine, taken from the 4th annual Alcohol Harm Snapshot Survey, One-in-eight patients in emergency departments affected by alcohol available from:

<https://acem.org.au/News/2017/December/One-in-eight-patients-in-emergency-departments-aff.aspx>

² Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, Position paper on alcohol related harm. Available from:

https://www.surgeons.org/media/20784483/2016-08-02_pos_rel-gov-025_alcohol_related_harm.pdf

³ McCarthy, J., A Hunter study provides evidence to back retention of 'Newcastle solution' licensing laws, The Newcastle Herald. November 23 2017. Available from: <http://www.theherald.com.au/story/5074625/newcastles-lockout-law-success-can-be-counted-by-the-men-who-arent-in-surgery/>

⁴ Manning, M., Smith, C., Mazerolle, P., The societal costs of alcohol misuse in Australia. Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice Journal. 2013. Available from Griffith Research Online: https://research-repository.griffith.edu.au/bitstream/handle/10072/58981/85722_1.pdf?sequence=1

⁵ Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education, National framework for action to prevent alcohol-related family violence. 17 June 2015. Available from: <http://fare.org.au/archives/14211>