



MEDIA RELEASE - 7 February 2011

Medical Evidence Shows Drinking Age Should Be 21

A new report examining the medical evidence argues that the drinking age should be raised to 21.

The report "*YOUNG PEOPLE AND ALCOHOL: What Does the Medical Evidence Tell Us About the Legal Drinking Age in New Zealand?*" was commissioned by Family First NZ, and prepared by UK psychologist Dr Aric Sigman. Dr Sigman is a Fellow of the Society of Biology, an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society, and a recipient of the Chartered Scientist Award from the Science Council. He recently addressed the European Parliament Working Group on the Quality of Childhood in the European Union in Brussels, and has visited NZ in 2004, 2007 and last year.

Dr Sigman argues that alcohol policies and decisions about a legal drinking age should be firmly based on the health and well-being of New Zealand's young people.

"The effects of alcohol on the brains and bodies of young people in New Zealand are the same as they are on young people on the opposite side of the world. And the social consequences are also highly similar," says Dr Sigman.

Dr Sigman shows that a new generation of evidence from a wide variety of medical and biosciences including neurophysiology, genetics, neuropharmacology, molecular neurobiology, forensic pathology, toxicology, hepatology, teratology, epidemiology and developmental psychobiology have brought into sharp relief the full range of new found effects of alcohol on young people.

"New medical evidence on accident probability, disease and brain development makes it absolutely clear that delaying the age at which teenagers and young people have easy access to alcohol will reduce the level of damage they and society suffer at the moment as well as contributing to their future health and well-being," says Dr Sigman

Dr Sigman concludes that New Zealand would benefit from adopting a single legal drinking age of 21, even if this is difficult to enforce.

"This will send an unambiguous message to young people and society about what is good for young people and will make it easier to exert authority over those of them who increasingly feel entitled to drink."

Family First is welcoming the report which will form part of their submission to the Justice and Electoral Select Committee considering the Alcohol Reform Bill.

"This report provides compelling evidence that the politicians should immediately increase the drinking age to 21, not for political reasons, but in the best interests of our young people and society," says Family First's Bob McCoskrie.

The Full Report can be downloaded from <http://www.familyfirst.org.nz/files/docs/pdf/full%20report.pdf>

Executive Summary <http://www.familyfirst.org.nz/files/docs/pdf/executive%20summary.pdf>

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Dr Sigman is also available for interview (UK-based)