

## **ONLINE ALCOHOL DELIVERY – CAUSE FOR CONCERN - ALCOHOL AND DRUG FOUNDATION – March 27, 2020**

*As Australians move to social distancing and self-isolation in a bid to slow coronavirus(COVID-19), there's also a move towards ordering alcohol online for home delivery Find out why this trend is concerning health professionals.*

In recent years, Australian online sales of alcohol have experienced rapid growth<sup>1</sup>, driven by new companies and existing retailers.<sup>2</sup>

There is limited research regarding the impact of these sales on alcohol-related harm but international research shows that generally, increased availability of alcohol is likely to lead to higher rates of consumption and harm.<sup>2</sup>

### **The risk of underage supply**

Many public health advocates are concerned that this method of selling alcohol has made underage and excessive consumption more accessible and is increasing alcohol-related harms.<sup>1,2</sup>

Ineffective regulation of online alcohol sales and deliveries has led to easier access to alcohol by people under 18 years of age.

A 2012 study in the United States found nearly half of all online alcohol orders placed by underage drinkers were delivered.<sup>3</sup> The study also found that less than 40 percent were rejected due to:

- the person's age
- no age verification
- inadequate identification
- no one home.<sup>3</sup>

Online purchasing and delivery of alcohol puts young people's health at risk by providing an easy way to access alcohol.<sup>2</sup>

It is a requirement in Australia that anyone selling alcohol in a licensed venue completes a Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) course. A key component is to train participants to verify that a person is of legal drinking age. However, RSA does not apply to online alcohol sales and delivery drivers.<sup>1</sup>

### **Supply to intoxicated persons**

The World Health Organization has found that alcohol intoxication can lead to increased deaths, suicides, injury, domestic violence, road accidents and child abuse and neglect.<sup>4</sup>

The online sale and delivery of alcohol is concerning as it provides ways for already intoxicated people to access more alcohol without having to leave the home.

Liquor legislation in all Australian states and territories specifies that it is unlawful to sell, serve or supply liquor on a licensed premise to an intoxicated person.<sup>1, 2</sup> As home delivery does not require visiting a licensed premise, these intoxication laws do not apply.

## Increased access to cheap alcohol

Many of the large, warehouse-style liquor stores have also entered the online delivery market, with a major retailer now providing delivery within a two-hour time frame in metropolitan areas and major regional cities. This means that many Australians now have the option to purchase very low-cost alcohol in a considerably short time frame without needing to leave their homes.<sup>1</sup>

## Potential for the rapid delivery of alcohol

Public health advocates are also concerned about the 'rapid delivery' of alcohol.

Many retailers are now delivering alcohol within thirty-minute time frames after a customer places an online order. One rapid delivery retailer intentionally targets parties by offering large amounts of alcohol as 'party starter', or 'weekend' bundles, at discounted prices.

It has been suggested that this type of service targets young people and enables quick purchase of alcohol, resulting in the continuation of alcohol consumption when the initial alcohol supply has been depleted.<sup>5</sup>

A recent research study from the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education supports this concern stating that *"on-demand delivery services were most popular among the youngest age group of 18 to 29 year-olds [and] more than a quarter who used on-demand services (28 per cent) reported that the delivery enabled them to continue drinking when they would otherwise have had to stop."*<sup>6</sup>

This type of service delivery may lead to significant harms in young people and others, including people at risk of suicide and domestic violence.

## Regulation to reduce harms

Quick and cheap online alcohol delivery services have experienced rapid growth. Public health advocates are concerned this may contribute to increased alcohol-related harm in Australia. Greater regulation is needed, as current alcohol licensing is inadequate.

## References:

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