



# **New Zealanders strongly support policies to curb alcohol harm - will government listen?**

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# Summary

Alcohol causes significant harm to the health and wellbeing of the consumer, their families, and society as a whole, making it Aotearoa New Zealand's most harmful drug. The way alcohol products are currently legislated perpetuates this, particularly for Māori who experience a disproportionate amount of harm.

New independent public polling commissioned by Health Coalition Aotearoa and the Cancer Society has found that the majority of New Zealanders support improved measures around alcohol availability, affordability, advertising, and protecting policy development from alcohol industry influence. These findings build on previous years' research and give the government a strong mandate for action to put health, safety and equity at the centre of our alcohol legislation.

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This Briefing describes the new independent public polling showing strong and growing support for a range of evidence-based policy measures to curb alcohol harm.

## **Alcohol is Aotearoa New Zealand's most harmful drug**

Alcohol causes approximately 900 deaths, 1,250 cancers, 30,000 hospitalisations, and 130,000 ACC claims per year.<sup>1</sup> Māori face inequitable harms and are twice as likely to die from an alcohol-related cause than non-Māori.<sup>1</sup> Alcohol harms not just individual health, both physical and mental, but also harms families, communities and society as a whole, costing us \$9.1 billion per year.<sup>2</sup> Despite this, current laws and policies allow alcohol products to remain cheap, readily available, and heavily advertised. This unfairly impacts some populations and communities more than others. For example, children see alcohol marketing on average 4.5 times daily, and tamariki Māori are exposed five times more frequently than Pākehā children.<sup>3</sup>

Strong evidence supports three main opportunities to reduce population alcohol consumption and harm: regulating affordability, availability and advertising ([Appendix 1](#)).

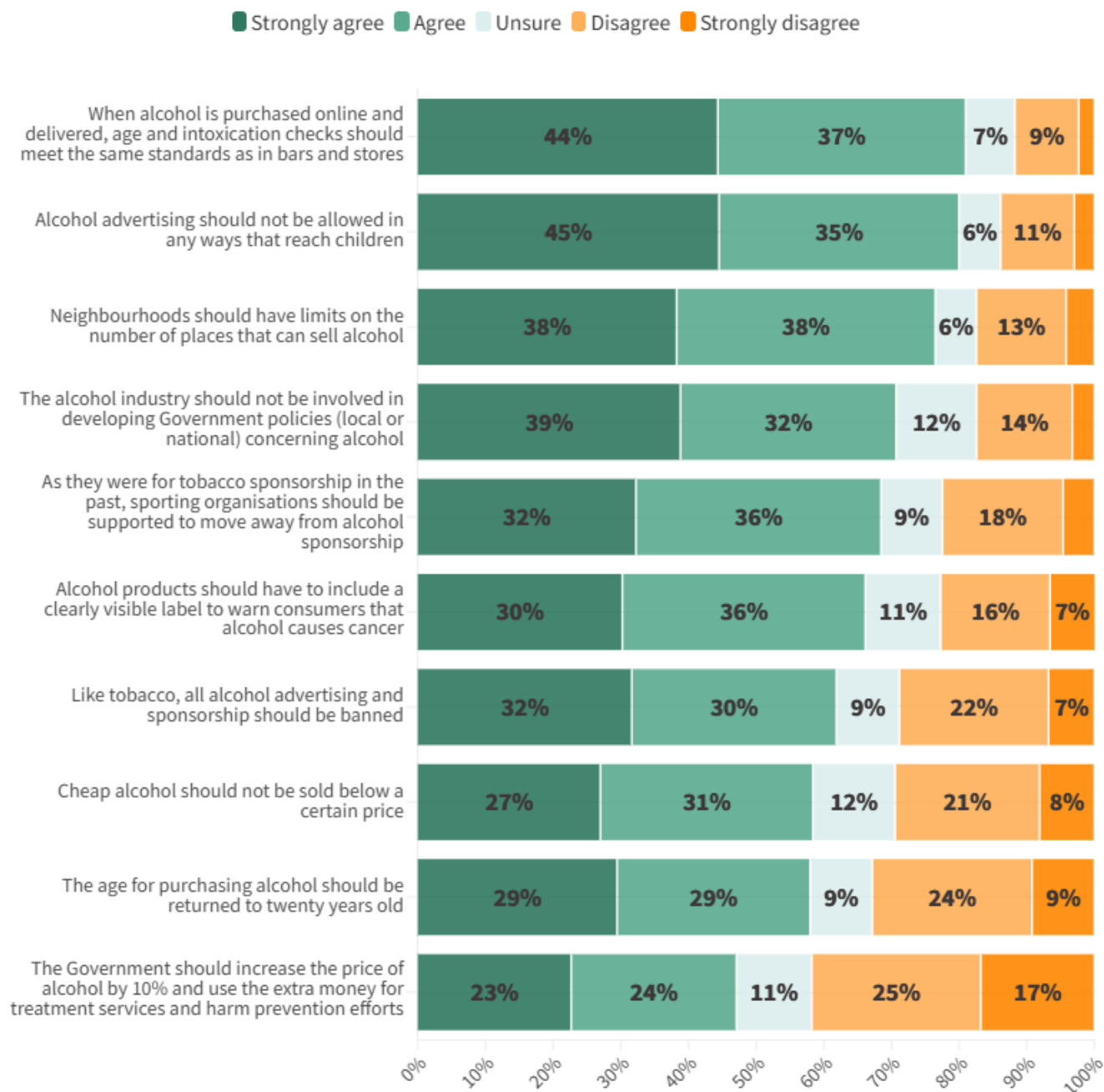
## **New survey to understand support for alcohol policy interventions**

Health Coalition Aotearoa and the Cancer Society commissioned a Talbot Mills survey in March 2025 assessing NZ adult opinion on the WHO 'best buy' interventions and more ([Appendix 2](#)).

The survey found that the majority of New Zealanders strongly agree or agree with almost every measure polled.

## Figure 1. New Zealanders support a range of alcohol policies

Findings from March 2025 survey, percentage of New Zealanders **agreeing** or **disagreeing**



Source: Talbot Mills

phce

## Majority support improved standards for how and where alcohol can be sold

[The Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012](#) sets standards for sale and supply of alcohol products in NZ and aims to minimise the harms they cause. An overhaul has long been recommended by health experts, indicating that it is not fit for purpose. Calls have been made to embed Te Tiriti o Waitangi,<sup>4</sup> strengthen community control in licensing, and regulate online purchase and delivery.<sup>5</sup>

In this survey, New Zealanders overwhelmingly agreed with improved standards for how and where alcohol can be sold:

- 81% agreed with online purchases and deliveries being subject to the same age and intoxication checks as bars and shops,
- 76% agreed with neighbourhood limits on the number of places that sell alcohol, and
- 58% agreed with returning the age for purchasing alcohol to 20.

## **Majority support safeguards on how industry is allowed to advertise alcohol**

There is strong evidence that exposure to alcohol advertising causes young people to start drinking earlier and to drink larger amounts.<sup>6-8</sup> This survey found that safeguarding New Zealanders, especially children, from alcohol advertising was supported by the majority of respondents.

Four in five people (80%) agreed with not allowing alcohol advertising to reach children in any way and 62% agreed with banning alcohol advertising and sponsorship altogether (up from 34% in 2023\*).<sup>9</sup>

There was also strong support for removing alcohol sports sponsorship, with 68% agreeing that sports organisations should be supported to move away from alcohol sponsorship (up from 58% in 2023\*).<sup>9</sup>

## **Many New Zealanders support policies to make alcohol less affordable**

Alcohol affordability is a strong driver of alcohol consumption.<sup>10-11</sup> Almost half (47%) of people agreed with increasing the alcohol price by 10% and using this to fund treatment services and harm prevention, which was similar to the 2023 poll findings\*. A majority of people (58%) agreed with minimum unit pricing on cheap alcohol, and this was up from 42% in 2023\*.<sup>9</sup> We expand on these results in [Appendix 3](#).

## **Majority agree that the alcohol industry should have no place in developing alcohol policy**

Four public inquiries in NZ have shown strong public and scientific support for 'best-buy' alcohol policies to curb harm, yet successive governments have ignored their key recommendations. This raises questions about the influence of commercial interests.<sup>12</sup> NZ does not regulate lobbying, which has been documented in recent investigations, and there is a lack of transparency about interactions between policymakers and the alcohol industry.<sup>13</sup>

This survey found strong and growing support for removing the influence of the alcohol industry in policymaking with 71% of people agreeing that the alcohol industry should not be involved in developing local or national alcohol policy. This was up from 51% in 2023\*.<sup>9</sup>

For the first time, the public were asked about support for a cancer warning label on alcohol products. Previous research has found that only 18% of New Zealanders are aware of the link between alcohol and cancer.<sup>9</sup> This low awareness is seen globally, and the US Surgeon-General recently called for mandated cancer warning labels on alcohol products.<sup>14</sup> Warning

labels have the potential to increase public awareness of the link between alcohol and cancer.<sup>15,16</sup>

The survey found that 66% of people agreed that alcohol products should have to include a clearly visible label to warn consumers that alcohol causes cancer.

## Conclusion

Restricting the availability, affordability and advertising of alcohol products can lead to major health gains and reduced inequities. The results of this survey show there is a strong public mandate to take action to reduce alcohol harm in our communities.

## What this Briefing adds

- New independent public polling commissioned by Health Coalition Aotearoa and the Cancer Society found strong support from New Zealanders for more controls around alcohol sale and advertising.
- This survey provides the most recent public perspective on alcohol policy in NZ, finding growing support from previous polls.
- The survey contextualises questions to the current alcohol and policy environment.
- The survey included new questions that reflect evidence-informed policy standards and low awareness that alcohol causes cancer.

## Implications for policy and practice

There is a strong public mandate to take action to reduce alcohol harm in our communities. Government must act to:

- Amend the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012 to strengthen community control in licensing, regulate online purchase and delivery and return the purchase age to 20.
- Develop a nationally consistent approach to capping the density of alcohol licenses.
- Increase alcohol taxes to reduce affordability of alcohol products.
- Ban all promotion (marketing) of alcohol products including in digital and print media, billboards, front facing retail outlets, branding of sports and cultural events, educational initiatives and charitable works.

\*We have included 2023 results for comparison where relevant, but we caution comparing results too closely as the methodology and question and response options differed between the two surveys. See [Appendix 4](#).

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## **Appendix 1: WHO Best Buys**

The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified these approaches as ‘best buys’,<sup>17</sup> and more recently as ‘quick buys’,<sup>18</sup> recognising their potential to deliver immediate public health benefits.

1. Affordability: Increase excise taxes on alcoholic beverages
2. Availability: Enact and enforce restrictions on the physical availability of retailed alcohol (via reduced hours of sale)
3. Advertising: Enact and enforce bans or comprehensive restrictions on exposure to alcohol advertising (across multiple types of media).

## **Appendix 2: Survey details**

Results are based upon questions asked in a Talbot Mills Research nationwide online survey of a sample of 1,161 nationally representative respondents in NZ 18 years of age and over. The questions were asked in March 2025.

Participants were asked *‘To reduce the problems associated with alcohol use, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements’* followed by a range of alcohol policy intervention statements.

This survey provides the most up to date data on current public opinion on alcohol policies of NZ adults.

## **Appendix 3: Many New Zealanders support policies to make alcohol less affordable**

Alcohol affordability is a strong driver of alcohol consumption.<sup>10,11</sup>

To reduce alcohol consumption and harm, it is recommended that alcohol excise tax increase by at least 50%.<sup>19</sup> On average, this will increase alcohol prices by 10%. A large body of high-quality research suggests that a 10% increase in price reduces overall consumption by 5%.<sup>20</sup> Addressing affordability is expected to result in significant health gains for the whole population, including heavier drinkers,<sup>20</sup> and a reduction in health inequities for Māori.<sup>21</sup>

Almost half (47%) of people agreed with increasing the alcohol price by 10% and using this

to fund treatment services and harm prevention, which was similar to the 2023 poll findings\*. This survey also found that 58% agreed that cheap alcohol products should not be sold below a certain price (minimum unit price).

Given the current economic climate, it is perhaps unsurprising that support for price measures was lower than for other measures surveyed. Despite this, a majority of people still agreed with minimum unit pricing on cheap alcohol, and this was up from 42% in 2023\*.<sup>9</sup>

## **Appendix 4: Comparison with 2023 data**

The last public opinion survey was the 2023 University of Otago/Cancer Society survey.<sup>9</sup> We have included 2023 results for comparison where relevant, but we caution comparing results too closely as the methodology and question and response options differed between the two surveys. Below we compare the percentage of respondents supporting (2023; total support or strongly support) or agreeing (2025; total agree or strongly agree) with related policy statements.



## Figure 2. Comparing 2023 and 2025 survey results

Wording and support/agreement for selected alcohol policies in 2023 and 2025 surveys.

### Industry influence



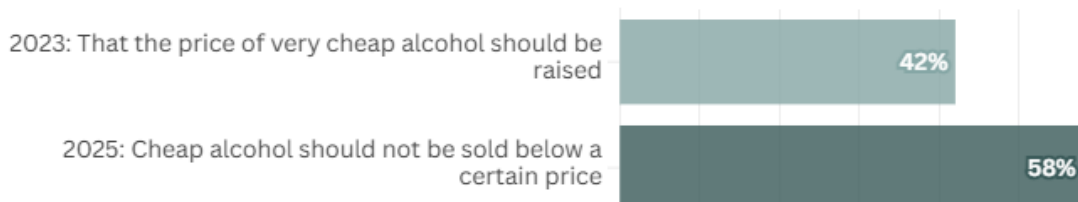
### Sponsorship



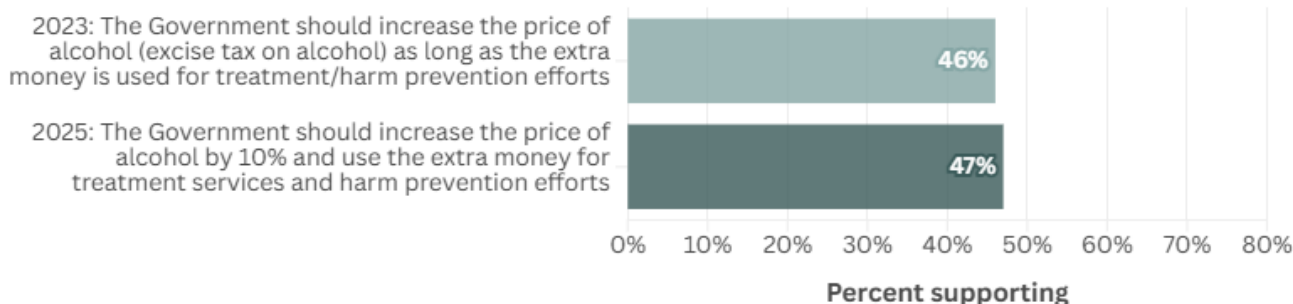
### All marketing and sponsorship



### Minimum pricing



### Excise tax



Source: 2023 Cancer Society / Unverity of Otago survey, 2025 Cancer Society / Health Coalition Aotearoa survey - Talbot Mills

Note: In 2023 responses were recorded on a 'Support-Oppose' scale, while in 2025 responses were recorded on an 'Agree-Disagree' scale.



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