

## STATEMENT

# Advancing Public Health in International Alcohol Control

MELBOURNE / 3 OCT 2019

Alcohol is the seventh leading risk factor for death and disability worldwide, causing three million deaths per year. It is the leading cause of death and disability for 15-49 year-olds, causing damage to families and economies in the most productive years of life.

Alcohol has received increased interest at the global level since 2005, culminating in the passage of a Global Strategy to Reduce Harmful Use of Alcohol by the World Health Assembly in 2010. In the context of the World Health Organization's larger programme of work on non-communicable diseases, WHO has reviewed the evidence base and identified the most effective and cost-effective ways forward to address alcohol use and problems, and called on countries to take voluntary steps to implement these.

At the same time, alcohol policies have evolved largely at the behest of commercial and trade interests, and with little attention to public health or to the abrogation of global human rights agreements protecting the general right to health and the specific rights of vulnerable populations, including women, young people, indigenous peoples, and people with disabilities.

Nearly ten years on, it is clear that the Global Strategy has failed to stem the tide of growing alcohol use and problems, particularly in the low- and middle-income countries where the level of harm per litre consumed is likely to be the highest.

The lack of a global sense of urgency, and the insignificant resources that have been devoted to implementation of the strategy, suggest that a completely different approach is needed. In view of this, we, the undersigned, declare that:

The alcohol industry has repeatedly demonstrated their irreconcilable conflict of interest with public health goals, as businesses that profit from the sale of alcoholic products. In light of this, governments at every level must act to protect public health laws and policies from commercial and other vested interests of the alcohol industry.

Trade and other commercial agreements should be drafted in a way that protects the rights of national governments to introduce public health measures related to alcohol for the benefit of their citizens. Governments should defend evidence-based alcohol control measures, and respect the rights of other nations to implement such measures.

There is a need for a legally-binding, global instrument committing countries and resources to effective approaches to reducing alcohol-related harm. Concrete steps should be taken to move towards effective global governance of the alcohol industry, to safeguard the rights of young people, women and other groups particularly vulnerable to alcohol-related harm, and to protect the right of all people to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

As researchers, we commit to continuing to create and translate into practice knowledge that can inform efforts to reduce the harm caused by alcoholic products. As members of civil society, we commit to publicizing and advocating for the implementation of the strongly evidence-based strategies identified by WHO.

We call on national governments and non-state actors without conflicts of interest to make a similar commitment to take decisive, concerted and sufficiently-resourced action at national and global levels to develop appropriate instruments and sufficient resources to stem the rising tide of alcohol consumption and problems worldwide.