

## **CARICOM**

### **Alcohol and the reduction of its use:**

Alcohol represents the least acknowledged of the four traditional risk factors associated with NCD prevention. In the Caribbean casual alcohol use has not been accorded the same importance as the other three associated risk factors. The reason is partially historic and to some extent political. The Caribbean is a leading rum producer in the world. Some of the most famous brands worldwide are produced here. Due to its relative economic importance criticism of alcohol usually is not tolerated.

This attitude tolerated by officialdom has done little to change the awareness of the general population regarding the problems associated with intemperate use of alcohol. As such the society has not addressed such issues as alcoholism and alcohol related injury. Clearly if the high incidence of NCDs and injuries is to be prevented, there has to be improved awareness of damage done by excessive use of alcohol in our societies.

There are some measures which are in place in some of our countries but which need to be more routine and strictly adhered to. Three examples come to mind: Breathalyser testing among drivers; earlier closing of entertainment functions and restricting the sale of alcohol to minors. Other can be contemplated: restricting the general advertising of alcohol and curbing the use of alcohol advertising to events promotion.

At the personal level every effort needs to be used to prevent early initiation of alcohol use. Besides incorporating elements of alcohol prevention in family life education, there should be rigid use of personal identification as criteria for sale of alcohol and as in the case of tobacco the regulation of alcohol to youth should extend to private functions.

In addition the recognition of alcoholism in our societies should be used as a catalyst to promote the proliferation of adult counselling services to give families an outlet to resolve issues which are often crying out for societal support.

Certainly all of the above calls for dedicated advocacy among the ruling classes to support these policy directions which should be part of the overall push to reduce the impact of NCDs and have the additional benefit of reducing the levels of violence in our societies.

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