

## **ROHAN**

*Madam Chair or Mr Chair*

Zeah and I are presenting to you the resolutions from the Young People and Alcohol Forum. I'd like to acknowledge the original owners of this land, the Gadigal people.

Yesterday, 58 young people, aged 13 to 22, met to talk about the harm that can result from alcohol misuse and ways to reduce that harm.

We came from Broken Hill to Lennox Head and from Jindabyne to Kyogle and nearly everywhere in between.

We included young people with a range of experiences about alcohol – young people currently in alcohol rehabilitation programs, some who have overcome alcohol dependence, some who drink regularly now, some who have grown up in families affected by alcohol, some who don't drink.

We included a teacher, an ambulance officer and a young person who works in a bottle shop.

In the month before the Forum, over 200 young people participated in consultations, to help us hear the views of young people who have all sort of experiences.

We heard from those in juvenile detention centres, young people in out of home care, children of alcoholics, young people now in rehabilitation and users of community based drug and alcohol services. These views helped the Forum finalise its resolutions.

The Forum proposed 67 resolutions.

We want to focus on a couple of the key messages from the Forum – about advertising, community connections, education in schools, and harnessing the commitment of young people.

The Forum focussed on abuse of alcohol, not on alcohol itself. We recognise the benefits of responsible use of alcohol, but also the enormous harm from alcohol abuse in our alcohol-soaked culture.

Young people drink because adults do, and for the same reasons as adults do. Young people in Australia will drink less when adults do.

We recommend that the risks of alcohol-related harm take a higher priority. The Forum proposes that labels on alcohol products be required to include a warning about the risks from misuse.

We also recommend that efforts be made to develop and promote some role models who don't drink. All adults are role models for young people, and we'd particularly like parents and family members to be role models, either as non-drinkers or responsible drinkers.

## **ZEAH**

Young people go to their parents and their friends for help. We are proposing that resources be directed to supporting parents to raise children effectively, including introducing them to alcohol appropriately.

We also propose that resources be directed to enabling young people to support each other as peers by providing information, support and access to help, when they need it.

The young people at the Forum recognised the work being done to help young people and their families by schools, health services, the Police and other organisations.

But many young people don't know about services, and would not feel happy about using them if they did. Young people need to have a personal relationship with someone, to trust them and believe they will maintain their confidentiality, before they will be happy about approaching or using a service.

We are proposing that schools, health services, police and other organisations work much more closely together. They need to work together to engage young people and their communities, focus on what the community needs and not worry too much about agency boundaries or who's responsible for which task.

Each agency might have to change the way they do things in each town or suburb – maybe health services should be provided through schools, or the Police Youth Liaison Officer be based in a non-government youth service.

The Forum stressed the need for young people to be able to get to know and trust the individual people who are providing services.

Very small communities matter too – they can't be left out. The responses in smaller communities might need to be very different from those in a city.

If we focus on peer, family and community supports for young people, the responses to small isolated communities need not be very expensive.

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The young people involved in the consultations and the Forum felt that they know about the effects of alcohol and the potential dangers. The education and information programs are working. We don't think we need any increase in education or information of that type.

We think information and education programs should be introduced earlier - probably in primary schools – and they could be linked to education opportunities and other support for parents of primary school children.

We suggest that a dollar for dollar program be introduced – so every dollar spent on alcohol advertising, is matched by an equal amount spent on harm minimisation.

The Forum suggested that education programs should include young people who have been or still are alcohol dependent themselves talking to other young people about their own experiences. This will have a greater impact on young people than the most skilful and informed teacher talking theoretically.

Many young people said they drink too much because there is simply nothing else to do – both in the city and the country – but more so in the country.

We recommend a systemic approach to increasing the recreational and entertainment opportunities for young people across the state – not a dance party every six months, but something to do every Saturday night, with transport to and from.

## **ZEAH**

At yesterday's Forum, 58 young people were completely motivated to help reduce the problems associated with alcohol misuse.

Many of the young people there had never had the opportunity to help solve problems like these before. Many young people who had their own problems with alcohol had never been asked their opinion.

The young people at the Forum felt actively engaged with the political process – for many of them it was the first time they felt any such connection. There was excitement and optimism in the room.

They want to help – they don't want themselves, their friends and families to keep getting sick, being attacked, having accidents or dying.

The Forum recommended that the involvement of young people in the Forum and the Summit continue through the implementation of the Summit recommendations.

We propose that any group set up, statewide or locally, to progress the results of this Summit, should be required to include young people, and to consult with the range of young people who will be affected.

It is important that any solutions proposed for communities are reality tested with young people before they are implemented.

We have seen too many examples of approaches being tried but not working because they're based on what adults think young people want, not on what young people have actually said.

The lead up to this Summit has shown that consultations with young people can't all be done just in one way - not all young people are at school, and not all live with their families, not all want to go to meetings or talk to people they don't know.

But many of them are eager to express their opinions, and make suggestions about solutions, when given a chance, and locally-based forums like yesterday's are worth exploring.

Young people are the experts about the lives of young people, and if this Summit is going to make a difference in their lives, young people need to be partners in making the solutions a reality.