

Let's get  
it right

# Drink driving and the Alcohol Reform Bill

Drink driving is one of the most visible and often horrific manifestations of alcohol-related harm. Our blood alcohol limit is too high. Let's get it right.

## Does BAC matter?

Yes. The evidence from nearly 300 international studies about blood alcohol content (BAC) levels and driving ability is overwhelming: the more you drink, the higher the risk of accident while driving.

New Zealand's current BAC limit is 80mg per 100ml of blood. Australia's BAC limit is 50mg, and many other developed countries have set limits of 50mg or even 20mg.

Places that have a lower BAC limit experience less drink driving and fewer alcohol-related deaths and injuries. It's that simple.

- New Zealand research shows lowering the adult BAC limit to 50mg would save between 15 and 30 lives and prevent between 320 and 686 injuries every year.
- Every 20mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood is associated with a near doubling of crash risk. At the current rate of 80mg, a driver is almost twice as likely to crash as a driver at 50mg.
- It is easier to keep track of how many drinks you've had when keeping below 50mg. This is about two cans of beer drunk by an average-sized male in one hour. People intending to keep below a limit of 80mg are more likely to lose count of their drinks.

## Is New Zealand getting it right?

No. Despite internalising this really complex situation in our heads and creating many compelling and graphic anti-drink driving campaigns, New Zealand still has a high rate of drink driving.

- New Zealand Police estimate 100 people are charged with drink driving each day.
- Alcohol-related crashes account for about 30 percent of our total road toll.
- Of all drivers involved in fatal car crashes in 2007, people aged 20-24 years (34 percent) and 25-29 years (31 percent) were the most likely to be affected by alcohol.

## What did the Law Commission recommend?

The Law Commission forwarded all submissions on drink driving to the Ministry of Transport's Safer Journeys consultation. It did however recommend:

- BAC limits for driving should be reduced from 80 to 50mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood for adult drivers
- the limit should be zero for drivers under 20 years of age
- alcohol interlock devices should be considered for all convicted drink drivers. These devices require the driver to provide an alcohol-free breath sample before the vehicle can be started.

## Does the Alcohol Reform Bill get it right?

No. In line with the Law Commission's recommendations, the Government recently introduced a zero-alcohol limit for drivers under 20. It has also implemented the recommendation around interlock devices for repeat drink drivers.

However, the adult limit remains at 80mg, with the Government requesting New Zealand-specific research on crashes involving drivers with BAC levels between 50 and 80mg. They argue this is necessary before any decision around lowering the limit is made. Given the overwhelming evidence about BAC levels, this is a cop out.

## FACTSHEETS

1	What you need to know
2	Alcohol pricing
3	Alcohol advertising
4	Alcohol availability
5	Drink driving
6	Mythbusting the alcohol industry
→	<a href="http://drugfoundation.org.nz/alcohol-reform">drugfoundation.org.nz/alcohol-reform</a>

# Let's get it right

## “ Current BAC limits are ‘ridiculous’. ”

Minister of Transport Hon. Steven Joyce speaking at a Local Authority Traffic Institute conference in Auckland on 9 September 2009

### Let's get it right

Most New Zealanders support a legal BAC limit of 50mg. When asked how much alcohol should be safe to drink before driving, 85 percent of those surveyed answered two drinks or less. This is equivalent to a BAC limit of 50mg.

To get it right, the Alcohol Reform Bill needs to:

- lower the BAC limit for adult drivers to 50mg.

#### FAST FACTS



# 1

THE NUMBER OF BOTTLES OF WINE AN ADULT MALE CAN CONSUME IN UNDER 90 MINUTES AND STILL LEGALLY BE ABLE TO DRIVE



# 30

THE NUMBER OF LIVES THAT WOULD BE SAVED EVERY YEAR ON NZ ROADS IF WE LOWERED THE BLOOD ALCOHOL LIMIT



# 686

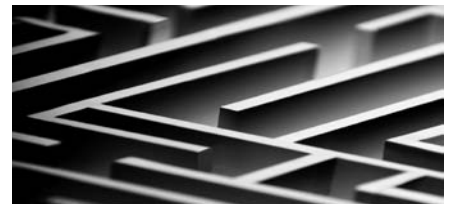
THE NUMBER OF INJURIES THAT COULD BE PREVENTED EVERY YEAR ON NZ ROADS IF WE LOWERED THE BLOOD ALCOHOL LIMIT



# 50mg

WHAT THE BAC LIMIT FOR ADULT DRIVERS SHOULD BE IN NEW ZEALAND

#### ABOUT US



The New Zealand Drug Foundation has long been interested in how the law governing the sale and supply of alcohol could be strengthened to reduce alcohol-related harm and create a healthier drinking culture in New Zealand.

We provide leadership and representation of our nationwide membership of organisations and individuals working on alcohol and other drug issues.

This factsheet is one of a number we have developed as part of a toolkit to support Members of Parliament, the media, communities and individuals to engage in evidence-based discussion on the Alcohol Reform Bill.

### Let's get it right

#### CONTACT

**E** [info@drugfoundation.org.nz](mailto:info@drugfoundation.org.nz)

**P** +64 4 801 6303

**F** [facebook.com/NZDrugFoundation](https://www.facebook.com/NZDrugFoundation)

**T** [twitter.com/nzdrug](https://twitter.com/nzdrug)