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Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority  
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### **Comment on Draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education**

The McCusker Centre for Action on Alcohol and Youth (MCAAY) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the draft Shape Paper for Health and Physical Education.

MCAAY is an independent organisation committed to reducing harms from alcohol among young people. The work of MCAAY aims to raise awareness of the magnitude of alcohol-related harms among young people, the approaches we know can work, other options and the need to act without delay.

We strongly support well-resourced Health and Physical Education (HPE) in the school curriculum and believe HPE should be given the same level of priority as the curriculum areas contained within Phase one and Phase two of the Australian Curriculum.

It is disappointing to note that the draft Shape Paper is very general with far too little detail to allow for a detailed response. It is a matter of serious concern that there is no specific mention of alcohol. The Paper makes broad reference to 'behaviours associated with substance use', but there is no specific reference to alcohol (or indeed tobacco). It is concerning that all substances are grouped together: there should be specific discussion of alcohol, tobacco, illicit and other drugs, as each plays a very different role in the Australian context, each should be addressed in the HPE curriculum in the appropriate level of detail, and one would expect some different approaches to the educational messages.

As you will be aware, there are significant concerns in the community about drinking patterns among young people. Australian children and young people are drinking at earlier ages, and drinking to get drunk. Eighty percent of the alcohol consumed by young people aged 14-24 years is consumed at levels that put them or others at immediate risk, for example, from falls, assault injuries, road crashes and burns.<sup>1</sup> Forty-three percent of 16-17 year old WA school students who consumed alcohol in the past week report that they drink

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<sup>1</sup> Chikritzhs T, Catalano P, Stockwell T, Donath S, Ngo H, Young D, et al. Australian alcohol indicators, 1990-2001: Patterns of alcohol use and related harms for Australian states and territories. Perth: National Drug Research Institute and Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre Inc; 2003.

to get drunk, and two-thirds believe that getting drunk is acceptable behaviour.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the concerning range of short term risks associated with excessive alcohol consumption, there is growing evidence that alcohol is implicated in a range of longer term consequences including harm to brain development.

In 2011, the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA commissioned a consultation with nearly 300 WA 14-17 year olds regarding alcohol use and their views on strategies to reduce alcohol-related harm.<sup>3</sup> A high level of support was shown for improved school alcohol education. Many of the young people who participated in the consultation believed school alcohol education was important and would be more likely to have an impact if it started at a young age.

Alcohol education in the school curriculum has exceptionally strong support in the community. A recent independent market research survey of 1600 West Australian adults conducted for MCAAY showed that 94% of Western Australians support regular, well-resourced alcohol and drug education for all school students (with only 2% opposed).

The notional time allocation for HPE of 80 hours per year for all aspects of HPE is appallingly inadequate to cover the necessary range of topics in sufficient detail. Further, it is of great concern that time allocated to HPE will be left to schools to decide, and it will be possible for schools to choose to spend even less time on HPE than the already insufficient 80 hours per year. Parents are entitled to expect that their children will be provided with quality HPE covering a range of important issues including alcohol.

Well-resourced, regular alcohol education in school is a necessary part of the comprehensive approach needed to prevent alcohol-related harm among young people and the wider community. We believe that Health and Physical Education, including a major focus in alcohol and drug education should be included in the first two phases of the curriculum.

We regret that the lack of substance in the current draft paper makes it impossible to offer any detailed comments. This is particularly unfortunate given the justified levels of community concern about drinking patterns among young people and extent of support for school alcohol education.

Yours sincerely,

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<sup>2</sup> Haynes R, Kalic R, Griffiths P, McGregor C, Gunnell A. Australian School Student Alcohol and Drug Survey: Alcohol Report 2008 - Western Australian results. Drug and Alcohol Office Surveillance Report: Number 2. Perth: Drug and Alcohol Office; 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Commissioner for Children and Young People WA. Speaking out about reducing alcohol-related harm on children and young people: The views of Western Australian children and young people. Perth: Commissioner for Children and Young People WA; 2011.