Surgeons condemn Berejiklean government's decision to prioritise NSW night time economy over reduction of domestic violence

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The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) voices strong concern with the foreshadowed dismantling of the February 2014 amendments to the *New South Wales Liquor Act*, colloquially known as the 'lockout laws', which have proven so effective in reducing alcohol-related harm in New South Wales from 2014.

"The timing of this announcement, magnitude of the changes, and inclusion of matters not included in the terms of reference of the recent Select Committee review of the Sydney night time economy are strong indicators of regulatory capture, and a government compliant with an industry keen to increase alcohol sales ahead of the upcoming Christmas and New Year period," said Dr John Crozier, RACS Trauma Chair.

"Sentinel evidence of the overweening power and coercive influence of the alcohol industry is the proposed rollback across the whole of NSW in the sale of takeaway liquor till midnight. This is particularly likely to escalate alcohol-related domestic violence, when coupled with the large number of online licences, allowing courier delivery within 30 minutes of ordering, which have been granted in the last 12 months.

"Following the introduction in February 2014 of 10pm restriction on takeaway sales of alcohol, an 8.4 per cent whole-of-state reduction in non-domestic violent assaults was reported. Shortly after the Callinan review in 2016, the NSW government expedited a one-hour extension of takeaway liquor sales until 11pm, in the face of strong pressure from the alcohol industry. Subsequently, there has been a 9 per cent whole-of-state increase in reported non-domestic violence assault rates. The Berejiklian government is aware of this fact, it was pointed out to them in the Select Committee's report.

"Yet another extension in the hours of trade in takeaway liquor is a significant breach of trust with vulnerable members of the community. This action demonstrates a profound lack of regard for victims of domestic violence. The slight financial benefit to the sellers of liquor and the alcohol production industry by the extension of takeaway sales from 11pm to midnight cannot, in the estimation of a reasonable person, be offset by the predicable increase in domestic violence, non-domestic violence and degradation of amenity which will follow."

RACS NSW Deputy Chair and 2019 NSW Premier's Woman of the Year Award finalist, Associate Professor Payal Mukherjee, also called for tighter alcohol controls.

Speaking on International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, Associate Professor Mukherjee said that that numerous studies have highlighted the link between alcohol and domestic violence, including a recent report released by the Australian Institute of Criminology.

"As surgeons, we plead for the Berejiklian government, which had declared reduction of domestic violence as a priority commitment….do the right thing - maintain an 11pm moratorium on takeaway liquor sales," Dr Crozier said.

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