

# 7<sup>SHARE</sup> What Hong Kong teens have to say on ways to tackle underage drinking, beyond the new law

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Letters

Later this month, Hong Kong will enter a new era in its approach to underage drinking. A new legislation will come into effect, making it illegal to sell alcohol to anyone under 18, covering also retail stores and not just restaurants.

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It has been a long time coming. However, a law is only the “end of the beginning”. Much work needs to be done to raise awareness of the challenges our youth face concerning alcohol consumption.

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We at KELY Support Group and Support! International Foundation co-organised our first youth conference “Tidal Wave Series” on April 21, bringing together young people aged between 14 and 24 and from different backgrounds. They came up with suggestions on how issues surrounding underage drinking could be more widely understood in Hong Kong society.

Representatives from the Department of Health, professionals from two international liquor companies, parents, school advisers and other stakeholders were actively engaged.

The assembled youth suggested that the government should improve messaging around the illegality of underage drinking by reviewing and restricting alcohol advertisements; strengthening alcohol licensing checks; requiring establishments to conduct ID checks of everyone buying alcohol (not just those they suspect might be underage); and implementing stricter law enforcement around underage drinking.



## Hong Kong must pay more attention to underage drinking problem

Improvement in education was deemed just as necessary. Participants believed the government needed to: invest in “prevention” education and engage with youth on alcohol issues in a more personal and interactive rather than top-down or instructive way; be compassionate with youth that transgress and not make the consequences life-ruining, as most youth are still unable to properly understand what they are doing.

Setting a better example in their own drinking behaviour would be [a more] effective parenting approach

Parents were not spared criticism, either. Generally, these youth felt that openness of discussion and setting a better example in their own drinking behaviour would be more effective parenting approaches. Just saying “No drinking!” was unlikely to be helpful.

Most of the youth felt that students needed to be engaged constructively at school. Organising discussions and forums were seen as a good way to express ideas, while award

programmes and social media platforms could be established to help students learn about the health effects of alcohol.

Underage drinking is a complicated challenge – not just for our youth, but for parents, schools, health workers, police and many other stakeholders. We are committed to spreading the word about this new law, and are hopeful that it can make a difference.

*Sky Siu, executive director, KELY Support Group, and Joseph Wan, founder and president, Support! International Foundation*

*This article appeared in the South China Morning Post print edition as: City must raise awareness of challenges concerning alcohol consumption facing our youth*