

Study calls for urgent regulation of unhealthy home deliveries

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Ordering an online Uber Eats, other food, alcohol or vaping delivery from the comfort of your couch is hugely popular—but a new study is calling for urgent Government action, due to concerns unregulated, on-

demand home deliveries may be damaging the nation's health.

The study, co-authored by two recent medical graduates for the University of Otago, Christchurch's, Department of Population Health, is believed to be the first of its kind to map the geographical spread and types of on-demand [delivery](#) services of unhealthy products across Aotearoa New Zealand, and the first to assess them at a nationwide level.

Published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, Dr. Hannah Miles and Dr. Brylie Apeldoorn's study took the form of a cross-sectional, desktop review of all on-demand delivery services in the country, over a four-week period in April–May last year.

"The surge of growth in online food, alcohol, nicotine and vape deliveries has been significant, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic," says co-author Dr. Hannah Miles. "What's more, it's expected to continue, with an almost 6% predicted annual revenue growth rate in Aotearoa New Zealand over the next three years."

Co-author Dr. Brylie Apeldoorn says their study exposes the need for urgent Government regulation to keep pace with this predicted growth.

"Ease of technology and [consumer demand](#) for on-demand, online, home deliveries has been fast-paced, despite the fact we currently have no standardized regulations for these platforms in Aotearoa New Zealand," says Dr. Apeldoorn. "Our concern is that without appropriate oversight, home deliveries have the potential to increase nutritional, alcohol and nicotine-related harms and counteract government actions to reduce them, including the SmokeFree 2025 goal."

The study identified a total of 130 services offering on-demand, third-party delivery of unhealthy commodities in Aotearoa New Zealand (excluding individual restaurants providing their own deliveries to

customers); with 76% supplying food; 37% alcohol; 23% vaping products and 21% cigarettes. A total of 91% had provision for ordering via phone apps.

Data were collected from the businesses' web pages and phone apps, examining their locations, product availability, times of availability, delivery costs, promotion strategies and the handling of legal issues relating to the purchase of age-restricted items.

Dr. Miles says they were surprised at the extent of on-demand, delivery access nationwide.

"As expected, our ten [largest cities](#) had the most services on offer, but we also found many available in smaller towns like Tokoroa and Levin, suggesting rurality is not necessarily a protective factor for avoiding unhealthy commodities.

"This raises concerns over inequity of access to [health services](#) from the downstream poor health effects of these products, especially on-demand alcohol deliveries."

The study found promotions are used as a [marketing strategy](#) by 97% of on-demand, online delivery businesses.

"It appears nearly all use promotion strategies to increase consumption, with widespread use of price promotions, memberships and referral rewards." says Dr. Miles.

The co-authors say of particular concern are the study's findings relating to the delivery of age-restricted alcohol, vaping and nicotine products. While all companies supplying them had a stated age verification process, only 87% had birthdate entry, and only 73% had an 18+ age pop-up on entering their websites. Worryingly too, only 60% appeared to

have product number limits.

The current Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012 specifies that for remote sales, alcohol delivery must not occur between 11pm and 6am, the liquor license must be displayed on the vendor's website and the vendor must take reasonable steps for age verification.

However, Dr. Apeldoorn says their study found anomalies—adding to their call for urgent Government regulation, to clarify potential legal liabilities.

"While all services complied with delivery hours, we found variability in licensing between services offering delivery of restricted items as a third-party service and those holding their own liquor licenses, with third-party services displaying the liquor licenses of the primary vendors on their websites, rather than holding their own liquor license," says Dr. Apeldoorn.

"In other instances, the liquor license was only issued for the area where the company is registered—not where it is delivering from, potentially raising problems in areas which currently operate under liquor licensing trusts. This raises concern around legal liability for the delivery of restricted items to underage or intoxicated people, and is suggestive of a greater rate of unlawful deliveries among third-party deliverers where the courier company holds no legal liability."

The co-authors say regulation and further monitoring is also urgently needed to avoid Aotearoa New Zealand following some concerning overseas trends. In Australia, 13.8% of online alcohol delivery providers offer "buy now-pay later" options, while a recent survey showed one third of respondents under 25 were delivered alcohol without an ID check or while they weren't home, despite codes to prevent this.

Study supervisor Dr. Rose Crossin says this study is timely, and provides vital baseline data to assist the team's future research into the public health and equity impacts of on-demand delivery services, and the need for regulation to keep pace with this rapidly evolving technology.

More information: Hannah Miles et al, Describing and characterising on-demand delivery of unhealthy commodities in New Zealand, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* (2022). [DOI: 10.1111/1753-6405.13230](https://doi.org/10.1111/1753-6405.13230)

Provided by University of Otago

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