

# AUSTRALIAN CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION ALLIANCE



## Marketing and promotion of alcohol

### Position Statement

#### Key messages

- Alcohol consumption is a major cause of harm in Australia and is an important risk factor for a range of chronic diseases including cardiovascular disease, cancer, type 2 diabetes and chronic kidney disease. It may also contribute to the development of other major chronic disease risk factors such as high blood pressure and obesity and overweight.
- Alcohol marketing and promotion contributes to young people's attitudes to drinking, starting drinking and drinking at harmful levels.
- Restrictions on alcohol marketing and promotion have been identified as an important intervention to reduce alcohol related harms.

#### Recommendations

- Phase out alcohol advertising and promotion in times and placements that have exposure to young people aged up to 25 years, commencing with banning alcohol advertisements during live daytime television broadcasts of sporting events on weekends and public holidays.
- Extend the phase out of alcohol advertising and promotion over time to advertisements in the print media, on billboards and public transport infrastructure, cinema and radio and internet and emerging media.
- Phase out sponsorship of sporting and cultural events by alcohol companies.
- Introduce a comprehensive regulatory framework for alcohol advertising in Australia which:
  - Covers all forms of alcohol marketing including point of sale promotions, print and media advertising, packaging, labelling, sponsorship, and internet and emerging media campaigns
  - Establishes clear public health goals, particularly in relation to vulnerable groups such as children and young people
  - Establishes an independent body for administering and monitoring the system with the power to formally investigate and penalise breaches
  - Provides meaningful and effective sanctions for breaches
- Research, monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of advertising restrictions in reducing exposure of young people to alcohol advertising and implement improvements as required.

#### Alcohol marketing and promotion in Australia

Alcohol marketing and promotion is a global industry which is increasingly dominated by large trans-national companies with extensive resources and budgets and sophisticated global marketing strategies (1).

Expenditure on measured alcohol advertising in Australia, which includes television, radio and print media as well as cinema and outdoor advertising, totalled \$125m in 2007(2). In addition, it is estimated that two to three times this amount is spent on other forms of promotion including sponsorship of sporting and cultural events, branded materials and point-of sale promotions (1;3).

Increasingly, interactive media such as the internet and mobile phones which are particularly appealing and accessible to a younger audience are being used to promote alcohol products(1;4;5).

Embedded and incidental advertising through product placement in films and television programs is also significant (1;5).

Sports sponsorship is a major avenue of alcohol promotion in Australia. Alcohol companies are one of the largest sponsors of sport in Australia, spending an estimated \$50m on this form of alcohol promotion each year (6). Notably, alcohol advertisements that accompany live sports broadcasts on weekends and public holidays are exempt from the daytime advertising restrictions which normally apply at these times. In 2007, 44% of alcohol advertisements on free to air television in major metropolitan locations were placed during the daytime slots, up from 38% in the year to March 2005, showing the impact of live sports programming (2).

## **Impact of advertising on alcohol consumption and harms**

Research increasingly confirms that there is a small but consistent association between alcohol advertising and overall levels of alcohol consumption and related harms (7-9). However, the position of the industry is that alcohol advertising is designed only to increase a product's market share rather than increasing total consumption (10).

Earlier research, particularly econometric studies which are subject to methodological limitations, yielded mixed results in relation to the impact of advertising on total alcohol consumption. However, recent studies using more sophisticated methodologies provide stronger evidence that alcohol advertising leads to higher overall alcohol consumption (7;8;11).

The strongest evidence relates in particular to the impact on young people, including children and adolescents. Studies consistently show that exposure to alcohol advertising and promotion is linked to a significantly increased likelihood that young people will start to drink alcohol and that those that already drink will drink more heavily (1;5;7;9;11-13). A US study of the impact of advertising exposure among 15-26 year olds found that for each additional advertisement in the average number of advertisements seen, the number of alcoholic drinks consumed increased by 1% and for each additional dollar spent on alcohol advertising per capita the number of drinks consumed increased by 3%. The effects of exposure were also cumulative with youth in markets with more alcohol advertising continuing to increase drinking levels into their late twenties while drinking levels for those exposed to less advertising plateaued in their early twenties (13).

There is also moderate but consistent evidence to suggest that point of sale promotions are likely to affect the overall consumption of underage drinkers, binge drinkers and regular drinkers (9;14). In addition ownership of alcohol branded merchandise among non-drinking children and adolescents predicts both early initiation to alcohol use and binge-drinking (15).

There can be little doubt that alcohol advertising and promotion especially targets the youth market. Advertising messages for alcohol tap into young people's goals of good times, sex and social acceptance; promotions increasingly use avenues such as the internet which are more accessible and appealing to younger drinkers; and sporting and cultural events which appeal to younger audiences are a major target of alcohol sponsorship (1;7).

Although the industry claims they do not deliberately target underage drinkers, young people under the age of 18 in Australia are only marginally less exposed to alcohol advertising than those over 18.

In 2007, people aged less than 18 years were exposed to advertising for beer and wine at between 72-84% of the rate of exposure for 18-29 year olds; for some brands in some markets, exposure was similar and even higher for 13-17 year olds (2). Sports sponsorship which provides an opportunity for daytime alcohol advertising during live sports broadcasts is likely to be a significant factor in this level of teenage exposure to alcohol advertising.

Exposure to alcohol advertising has been found to shape young people's beliefs, attitudes and drinking behaviours and several studies have shown that young people are adept at interpreting the messages, images and targeting of alcohol advertisements in the same way as adults (16;17).

The impact of alcohol advertising on young people is of particular concern because they bear a disproportionate level of harm from alcohol-related accidents and injury (1;3). Early initiation to alcohol is also associated with a higher risk of problem drinking in adulthood and with long term adverse health impacts including increased risks for a range of diseases (18;19).

Risky drinking behaviour is common among young people in Australia. By 18 years of age, approximately 50% of both males and females are risky drinkers and young Australians aged 18-24 years report the highest prevalence of high risk alcohol consumption of all age groups (1). Under-age drinking is also a problem with around one quarter of all 14-19 year olds drinking at levels that put them at risk of short term harm at least monthly. In addition 8.8% drink at levels which put them at risk of long term harm (20).

### **Impact of restrictions on alcohol advertising**

A number of major reviews have supported the conclusion that restricting alcohol advertising is likely to lead to a reduction in alcohol consumption and related harms (5;9;21;22). This is further supported by evidence that countries with greater advertising restrictions have lower alcohol consumption rates and fewer alcohol related harms (21;22).

The World Health Organisation has identified alcohol marketing, especially its impact on youth, as a major public health issue and recommends that governments “effectively regulate the marketing of alcoholic beverages, including effective regulation or banning of advertising and of sponsorship of cultural and sports events, in particular those that have an impact on younger people” (7).

In its recent report, the National Preventative Health Taskforce also recommends a staged approach to phasing out alcohol promotions from times and placements which have high exposure to young people aged up to 25 years (3).

Restricting alcohol advertising and promotion has been identified as an important cost-effective policy measure to reduce alcohol related harms, both internationally and in Australia (5;8;9;21;22). Partial or complete bans on alcohol advertising have been estimated to yield likely benefits of \$2.45bn and \$3.86bn respectively in Australia (8). The effect of restrictions on tobacco advertising in reducing smoking rates is also indicative of the potential public health benefits that could be achieved by restrictions on alcohol advertising.

Restrictions on alcohol advertising are likely to have the greatest impact if they are part of a comprehensive strategy to address alcohol harm reduction (3).

### **Regulation of alcohol advertising in Australia**

Alcohol advertising in Australia is subject a number of codes of practice including the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice, the Australian Association of National Advertisers Advertiser Code of Ethics, which sets out general standards for all advertisers, and the voluntary industry self-regulatory code, the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC).

The Commercial Television Code of Practice restricts alcohol advertising to mature and adult viewing classification periods, which apply from 8.30pm to 5am every day and from 12 noon to 3pm during school days. A significant exception applies to advertisements that accompany the live broadcast of a sporting event during weekends or public holidays or if the event is broadcast simultaneously across a number of licence areas or time zones (23).

The ABAC covers all advertisements for alcohol beverages produced for publication or broadcast in Australia other than point-of-sale material and product naming and packaging. It requires that alcohol advertisements present “a mature, balanced and responsible approach” to the consumption of alcohol products. In particular, it requires that alcohol advertisements do not have a strong or evident appeal to children or adolescents, or depict the consumption or presence of alcohol as contributing to personal, business, social, sporting, sexual or other success (24).

A review of the alcohol self-regulatory system in 2003 found a number of shortcomings with the scheme including the lack of a public health focus, lack of coverage for all forms of promotion and an ineffective complaints process(25). As a result the code was extended in 2004 to include internet advertising and sponsorship and a public health expert was added to the complaints panel.

However, subsequent studies have found that the revisions to the ABAC code and associated processes have not reduced the problems associated with alcohol advertising in Australia (4;26).

Further recommendations have since been made by the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy to improve the scheme (27), but at this stage, ABAC remains a voluntary code with limited scope, no means of enforcement and no penalties for non-compliance. Nor is there any systematic, independent monitoring, auditing or research with respect to ABAC's processes and outcomes.

The Australian experience with industry self-regulation is consistent with international experience that indicates that attempts to restrict alcohol marketing primarily through voluntary codes are inadequate (5;7;21;28).

### **Acknowledgement**

This position statement is based on the Marketing and Advertising of Alcohol position statement developed by the Alcohol Policy Coalition.

### **Further information**

Related ACPDA Position Statements available from [www.cancer.org.au/acdpa](http://www.cancer.org.au/acdpa)

- *Alcohol and Chronic Disease Prevention*
- *Alcohol Pricing and Taxation*
- *Health information and warning labels on alcohol*
- *Alcohol Supply*

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