

DRIVEN TO DRINK: AUSTRALIAN-FIRST STUDY SHEDS MORE LIGHT ON FACTORS INFLUENCING YOUTH DRINKING

14 January 2019: Stop marketing alcohol to children on television and you would reduce youth drinking.

That's the finding from a new longitudinal research study on the push/pull factors that influence adolescents' drinking behaviours, which found that alcohol advertising exposure directly influences and encourages adolescents to engage in risky drinking.

The study, *How do alcohol control policies influence Australian adolescent drinking trends?*, is the first Australian study to examine the relative influence of multiple alcohol policies, television alcohol advertising, retail alcohol outlet density and the proportion of alcohol-related articles in daily newspapers, on the drinking behaviour of adolescents.

The research study was led by the Cancer Council of Victoria and funded by National Health & Medical Research Council Partnership Project, the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) and VicHealth.

Lead author Dr Victoria White says the report is important research looking at the policy and social environment variables that influence the drinking behaviour of young people.

"One of the key findings of this report is that the risky drinking of adolescents can be reduced by restricting youth access to alcohol, reducing the availability of alcohol and reducing television advertising," Dr White said.

"The study emphasises the important role of government-led, population-directed policies in cutting the strings on alcohol inducements that pull our young generations towards problem drinking."

FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn agrees and says the study shows the power the alcohol industry wields over adolescents.

"This study is yet further evidence that when the alcohol industry increases TV advertising and boosts the density of local bottle shops, it directly influences and encourages adolescents to engage in risky drinking," Mr Thorn said.

The study's release comes ahead of the Australian Open, and with momentum gathering for calls to lift the exemption that allows unrestricted alcohol advertising in children's viewing hours during sporting events on TV.

Nine in 10 Australians condemn alcohol advertising targeting children – and with a population of 25-million that's a swag of Aussies who agree that booze has no place in the virtual bond between adoring young fans and their sports champions.

A new digital campaign **NO ALCOHOL ADS TO KIDS. NO EXCEPTION.** (<http://noexception.org.au>) gets underway today highlighting the strikingly-obvious problem, which is that kids are protected against alcohol advertising on TV, except during sporting broadcasts.

Campaign champion, Federal member for Bennelong and tennis great John Alexander MP says children should be able to watch the Australian Open on the telly without being bombarded by alcohol ads.

“Children are vulnerable and impressionable and shouldn’t be on the receiving end of a barrage of alcohol ads when they watch their tennis heroes this summer,” Mr Alexander said.

“Sports’ smallest fans are our biggest responsibility so I am appealing to all Australians to get behind this campaign that will end this unfair and unreasonable exemption,” he said.

Michael Thorn is available for interview.

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Key findings

Alcohol advertising on television

- Alcohol product advertising on television was positively related to risky youth drinking.
- Findings suggest that self-regulation of alcohol advertising on TV is not sufficient to stop adolescents from being exposed to these advertisements.
- Although the study recorded an overall decrease in alcohol advertising expenditure directed at television, the decrease may reflect a change in the marketing strategy of alcohol beverage companies, from general TV advertising to greater use of other advertising channels including the internet and sport and other sponsorships.

Alcohol outlet density:

- Higher alcohol outlet density increases the likelihood of Australian adolescents engaging in past-month drinking and risky drinking behaviour.

Alcohol in Australian newspapers:

- The number of alcohol-related articles in major daily Australian newspapers more than doubled between 2000-11. However, the content of these articles broadened from mainly promoting alcohol by industry spokespeople to include messages from health advocates about policy/restrictions and responsible beverage service.

Alcohol control policies:

- Across four states, policy in the areas of trading hours, youth access and drink driving strengthened over the 11-year period. Adoption of policies occurred at different rates, with the greatest increase seen in the drink driving domain and the smallest increase seen in the trading hours domain.



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