

## ESPORTS THE NEXT FRONTIER OF TARGETED ALCOHOL ADVERTISING

**11 September 2019:** New research into esports shows that with explosive growth and investment, zero regulation and a young player base, producers of dangerous and unhealthy commodities are now targeting and exploiting a new vulnerable audience.

Australian first research released today examines the extent of esports partnerships and the advertising of unhealthy commodities.

To be launched in Canberra at a forum hosted at Parliament House by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) and the national *End Alcohol Advertising in Sport* campaign, the analysis confirmed esports as the latest digital domain where participants are immersed in alcohol advertising.

The study found that heavy gamers are more likely to purchase alcohol brands that sponsor an online game they play or watch, and drink more alcohol when gaming.

It also found addicted gamers and heavy gamers (those that played or watched 3-4 days per week or more) drink more heavily and drink more frequently than casual gamers.

Lead researcher, Associate Professor Sarah Jane Kelly from the University of Queensland, says her research shows that the burgeoning billion-dollar esports sector, which combines sport and entertainment – bringing together players and followers – is a lucrative platform for advertising of alcohol, betting, energy drinks and fast food.

“Esports is rapidly becoming the largest entertainment industry in the world, with an audience of 500 million globally and more than \$1 billion in revenue annually,” Associate Professor Kelly said.

“And although competitive online gaming is still emerging in Australia, with an audience of four million people, our study has found esports is already a highly successful environment for alcohol companies to reach minors and young adults,” she said.

Associate Professor Kelly says this is partly due to unique factors that include a greater range of sponsor activations and the lengthy duration of audience participation.

“Our findings highlight four factors that make digital regulation a priority issue: the high prevalence of unhealthy product advertising; the monetisation and growth of esports; the complete absence of regulation; and last, but not least, the fact that more than half of the study cohort would be considered addicted gamers,” Associate Professor Kelly said.

The explosive growth in esports was further highlighted by last week’s announcement that the largest esports venue in the southern hemisphere would open in Melbourne in 2020.

Associate Professor Kelly says bringing esports into line with governance mechanisms associated with traditional sports, while not a replacement for effective government regulation, would be one way to introduce greater scrutiny and governance.

“Esports could be brought into the sports tent and subject to all the rules and conventions that apply to ‘recognised’ sports. That is not in of itself a replacement for effective government regulation, but certainly worthy of consideration,” Associate Professor Kelly said.

The forum, *In their sights: The dark arts of digital alcohol marketing*, today brought together politicians, policymakers, public health advocates, and experts in marketing and digital media to discuss the digital marketing landscape and consider steps to protect children online.

“Our digital environments, which now include esports, are inundated with covert, ungated marketing, giving alcohol companies unrestricted contact with children and adolescents,” said FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn today.

“Alcohol marketers are capitalising on high-tech advertising models, trickery and tactics that target Australia’s love of sharing cultural and sporting moments, in life and online,” he said.

Mr Thorn says mainstream regulations fail to safeguard children from the ubiquitous, but highly targeted, online advertising of alcohol brands and other harmful products, as shown by the ACCC Digital Platforms Inquiry Final Report.

“Today’s forum highlighted multiple examples of unethical practices of marketers and digital platforms, including around the collection, use and sale of children’s personal data,” Mr Thorn said.

“The lack of legal protections to stop alcohol companies and digital platforms directly targeting vulnerable people, especially children is a grave concern. The Federal Government must now make it a top priority, to respond to the recent ACCC report,” Mr Thorn said.

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## PARLIAMENT HOUSE FORUM

### IN THEIR SIGHTS: THE DIGITAL DARK ARTS OF ALCOHOL MARKETING

To demonstrate the urgency for political action, the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE), together with the *End Alcohol Advertising in Sport* campaign, are holding a forum at Parliament House, Canberra.

- **DATE:** Wednesday 11 September 2019
- **TIME:** 3:30-5:30pm
- **VENUE:** Committee Room 2R1, Parliament House
- **SPEAKERS:**
  - Associate Professor Sarah Jane Kelly, University of Queensland
  - Dr Crystal Abidin, Curtin University
  - Dr Nicholas Carah, University of Queensland
  - Professor Simone Pettigrew, The George Institute for Global Health
  - Stephen Mayne
  - Michael Thorn, Chief Executive, Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education

(All speakers are available for interview)

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