

11 November 2024

Free TV Australia
Suite 1, Level 2
76 Berry Street
North Sydney NSW 2026
Via email codereview@freetv.com.au

To Free TV Australia,

Re: Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice Review

The Alcohol and Drug Foundation (ADF) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the review of the *Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice*. The ADF delivers evidence-based approaches to minimise alcohol and other drug (AOD) harm. We recognise the power of strong and connected communities and the important role they play in preventing problems occurring in the first place. A community-centric approach is at the heart of everything we do.

Alcohol takes a significant toll on our communities, contributing to several health and social harms. In 2023, there were 1,667 alcohol-induced deaths in Australia.¹ Hospitalisations related to alcohol are increasing, with 59% of drug-related hospitalisations in 2021-22 relating to alcohol use (an increase from 57% in 2020-21).² Alcohol also has broad impacts in the community, with almost half of Australians having been harmed by another person's alcohol use.³ In addition to these acute harms, alcohol is the fifth highest risk factor contributing to the burden of disease in Australia.⁴ Alcohol use is causally linked to over 200 chronic conditions and at least seven types of cancer.^{5, 6} Research has established a clear association between alcohol and the frequency and severity of family violence, in which alcohol plays an exacerbating role.⁷⁻⁹ The total societal cost associated with alcohol use in Australia has been estimated at \$75 billion in 2022-23.¹⁰

Alcohol advertising is a key evidence-based factor in driving alcohol harms. Exposure to alcohol marketing has a causal effect on the trajectory of harm, particularly for young people.¹¹⁻¹⁴ There is clear evidence that alcohol advertising and marketing promotes positive thoughts and expectancies towards this harmful product, earlier initiation into drinking and higher levels of alcohol consumption.¹⁵⁻¹⁷ We need regulatory systems that ensure safe and healthy environments for everyone, especially for children and other Australians most at risk from harm. The development of the standards and regulatory framework must be protected from influence by commercial or vested interests.

Level 12
607 Bourke Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

PO Box 818
North Melbourne
VIC 3051

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 03 9611 6100
 adf@adf.org.au
adf.org.au ABN 66 057 731 192

The ADF supports Alcohol Change Australia's submission and recommendations to this Review, including:

- Removal of the extension on the times when M programs can be shown, which increases advertising at times when children are watching TV, consequently increasing exposure to alcohol and other harmful product advertising.
- Removal of the exemption for alcohol advertising to be permitted during sports broadcasts.
- Amendment of the definition of "commercial for alcoholic drinks" to remove the exemption for 'program sponsorship'.

Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice

We strongly oppose the proposed draft which extends the hours across the year that M-classified programs can be shown, allowing M programs to be shown for extended hours on school and non-school days like school holidays, weekends and public holidays. This proposed change will increase the number of hours that advertising can be shown to times when children are more likely to be watching television, removing protections which limit exposure to harmful product advertising. For example, given that the times for alcohol advertising are based around the program times for the M and M15+ classifications, this change is likely to increase the exposure of children to alcohol marketing.

Loopholes in current advertising standards allow alcohol to be advertised during televised sport events. Research has found that in 2012 alone, children and adolescents in Australia received 51 million exposures to alcohol advertising through sport on TV.¹⁸ One Australian study found that the 10 highest-spending alcohol brands placed over 10,600 alcohol ads during Australian sports broadcasts in a single year.¹⁹ This equated to approximately 201 ads or 75 minutes of alcohol advertising from these brands weekly. Of these ads, 45% were during children's viewing times, equating to 34 minutes/week.

The current definition for alcohol commercials is also limited in scope and results in alcohol advertising at times when they are otherwise not permitted. The definition fails to prevent advertising to children and young people by enabling alcohol sponsorship of sports broadcasts and teams. Sport sponsorship enables alcohol brands to employ a variety of marketing strategies to promote their products to various audiences, including demographics which are out-of-reach due to advertising code restrictions. Televised sporting events feature a high number of alcohol references and children and adolescents are exposed to them due to the daytime programming of sport.²⁰

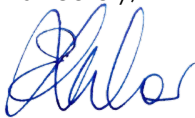
Evidence also demonstrates that sporting events are associated with increases in family and domestic violence.^{21, 22} This was acknowledged by the recent Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches for family and domestic violence, which referenced evidence demonstrating an increase in domestic violence incidents during football grand finales and the high number of young people who watch sport.²³ The ADF therefore strongly supports ACA's recommendation that the exemption for alcohol advertising during sporting events be removed, and the definition of alcohol commercials be updated to ensure that the Code adequately protects viewers from alcohol advertising, particularly children and young people.

In addition to the sport exception, alcohol advertising restrictions during children's viewing hours also does not apply to broadcast video on demand (BVOD). This means children watching a show streamed at any time of the day, may be exposed to alcohol advertisements. The ADF supports

ACA's recommendation that the Government address this as part of a broader regulatory framework to protect the community from the exposure to alcohol marketing.

The ADF thanks Free TV Australia for the opportunity to comment on the Code Review. Please do not hesitate to contact us about any aspect of this submission.

Sincerely,



Dr Erin Lalor

CEO

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E erin.lalor@adf.org.au

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