



## MEDIA RELEASE

# ALCOHOL MEDIA LITERACY PROGRAM A GAME CHANGER FOR CANBERRA SCHOOLS

**29 July 2016:** Canberra high school students will be challenged to think critically about alcohol advertising, as they take part in an innovative new program designed to counter alcohol industry messages.

The media literacy program, *Game Changer+*, will be officially launched by Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Assistant Minister for Health Meegan Fitzharris MLA in Canberra today, and will be introduced in selected local schools from Term 3.

*Game Changer+* is an initiative of the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE), and is supported by the ACT Government under the ACT Health Promotion Grants Program.

The program takes a proactive and preventive approach to improving public health and minimising risky drinking behaviour with a curriculum designed to equip students with key media literacy skills so they can interpret and challenge unhealthy advertising.

Assistant Health Minister Meegan Fitzharris welcomed the initiative.

“It’s important that we support and empower young people in our community to make healthy choices around alcohol consumption that will become a foundation for their adult lives, and I’m pleased to launch this new pilot program,” said Minister Fitzharris.

The eight-lesson program, which complements schools’ existing health education curriculum, will be taught to Year 9 and 10 students at Canberra High School, Caroline Chisholm School, Namadgi School, and Radford College.

The course is based upon a successful New South Wales initiative developed by a team of researchers from the Australian Catholic University’s Centre for Health and Social Research (CHaSR) in Melbourne.

Lead researcher Professor Sandra Jones, Director of CHaSR, says that media literacy is an effective ‘counter marketing’ intervention in response to the barrage of sophisticated and powerful alcohol industry messages targeted at young people.

“Research shows that children are exposed to a constant stream of alcohol advertising, and that their drinking attitudes and behaviours are strongly influenced by exposure to these messages.

Unfortunately, students, teachers and their parents are often unaware of the tactics the alcohol industry uses to make alcohol advertising appealing and to mislead young people about the effects of alcohol consumption,” said Professor Jones.

The latest data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows that 34 per cent of 12 to 17 year olds have tried alcohol, with a third of them drinking it every week.



Foundation for Alcohol  
Research & Education

One in four Australians (25 per cent) aged between 14 and 17 had consumed alcohol at a risky level in the last year, drinking more than five standard drinks on a single occasion.

Research has found that about half of all alcohol advertisements on free-to-air television appear during children's popular viewing times.

FARE Chief Executive, Michael Thorn says that now, more than ever it is important to have programs such as *Game Changer+* that provide a positive influence, and challenge and counter the social norms around alcohol and young people.

"*Game Changer+* increases young people's awareness of the nature of the advertising and alcohol industries, encourages them to think critically about what they're seeing, and empowers young Australians to make informed choices regarding the consumption of alcohol," Mr Thorn said.

ENDS

#### Media notes

ACT Assistant Minister for Health, Meegan Fitzharris MLA, will officially launch the *Game Changer+* media literacy program at 10:30am on Friday 29 July at the Canberra Museum and Gallery Theatre, corner of London Circuit and City Square, Canberra City.

Mr Michael Thorn and Professor Sandra Jones are available for interview.

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The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to stop the harm caused by alcohol. Alcohol harm in Australia is significant. Over 5,500 lives are lost every year and more than 157,000 people are hospitalised making alcohol one of our nation's greatest preventative health challenges.

For over a decade, FARE has been working with communities, governments, health professionals and police across the country to stop alcohol harms by supporting world-leading research, raising public awareness and advocating for changes to alcohol policy. In that time FARE has helped more than 750 communities and organisations, and backed over 1,400 projects around Australia.