# Alcohol label audit 2013

## Researchers

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## Summary

At present, there is no mandatory requirement for the labels on alcohol products to carry a health warning. However, over the last few years there has been increasing support (among policymakers, the public and health advocates) for the introduction of a health warning labelling scheme on alcohol products, in particular to ensure that alcohol products contain messages about the risks of drinking during pregnancy.

In December 2011, Australian health ministers through the Legislative and Governance Forum on Food Regulation announced that the alcohol industry would have two years to adopt a voluntary labelling scheme. A labelling scheme developed by DrinkWise has been adopted by most major manufacturers as the industry standard for this purpose. In 2011, the former Chair of the DrinkWise Board stated that DrinkWise would work with the industry to ensure that consumer information messages would be displayed on the majority of alcohol products within this two year period. An independent evaluation to be completed in 2014 will be used by the Legislative and Governance Forum on Food Regulation to determine whether or not a mandatory scheme is required.

The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) contracted Ipsos Social Research Institute (Ipsos SRI) in 2012 to conduct an independent audit of alcohol labels which found that only 16% of audited products carried a DrinkWise consumer information message.

Ipsos SRI was contracted by FARE to repeat the audit in 2013 to: estimate the proportion of alcohol products displaying the DrinkWise messages (and to investigate any other advisory labels present); determine how frequently each of the different DrinkWise messages is displayed, on what products/categories and by which producers; investigate the size and placement of DrinkWise messages; and compare these results to those of the previous audit conducted in 2012.

An audit of alcohol labels on a sample of products selected from each category of alcohol was undertaken with an identical methodology used for the 2012 and 2013 audits in which researchers visited a number of alcohol retailers to audit labels of products from a list that had been randomly selected. The audit was carried out from 24 to 28 June in 2013, and 18 to 22 June in 2012.

## Outcomes

Of the total sample of 251 products audited in 2013, more than one third (37%, or 92 items) carried any version of the DrinkWise consumer information messages. This compares with 16% in 2012.

Some differences in the application of DrinkWise messages were observed in 2013 compared with 2012. The ‘Kids and alcohol don’t mix’ message observed in 2012 was not present on any of the audited products in 2013. A new label variation observed in 2013 was the square ‘Get the facts drinkwise.org.au’ logo with the ‘It is safest not to drink while pregnant’ message.

Based on the total sample of products audited in 2013, 35% of beer/cider products, 31% of wine and 43% of spirit/mixed drink products carried any of the DrinkWise consumer information messages.

There were increases in the proportion of products with DrinkWise messages across all categories. Greater increases were observed for spirit/mixed drinks (from 6% in 2012 to 43% in 2013) and wine (from 10% in 2012 to 31% in 2013) than for beer (from 30% in 2012 to 35% in 2013).

Most of the major manufacturers whose products were audited in 2012 and 2013 appeared to have a larger proportion of products carrying DrinkWise messages in 2013 (with the exception of Coopers and Independent Distiller’s Group). Of the largest manufacturers, only two in five SAB Miller (41%) and Lion (40%) products carried any of the DrinkWise messages in 2013.

DrinkWise messages about drinking alcohol in pregnancy were more commonly observed in 2013 than in 2012. In total, 26% of all products audited in 2013 carried a pregnancy-related DrinkWise message (compared with 6% in 2012), with the most commonly observed version being the ‘get the facts drinkwise.org.au’ logo used in conjunction with the pregnancy silhouette (found on 15% of all products audited in 2013). Other combinations of messages were found on between between 2% and 5% of all products audited in 2013.

The ‘Get the facts drinkwise.org.au’ logo used in conjunction with the pregnancy silhouette was the most common version of DrinkWise messaging found on beer/cider and wine products in 2013.

The ‘Get the facts drinkwise.org.au’ logo used with the ‘Is your drinking harming yourself or others’ message was the most common version found on spirit/mixed drink products in 2013.

Overall, 24% of beer/cider products, 28% of wine products and 27% of spirit/mixed drink products audited in 2013 carried some form of DrinkWise pregnancy message.

As in 2012, most of the DrinkWise (86%) consumer information messages observed in 2013 took up less than 5% of the alcohol label or face of the packaging on which they were located and close to three in five (59%) products audited in 2013 featured the message on the back of the product.

In 2012 and 2013, a range of other (non-DrinkWise) logos and plain text statements were observed on audited products. Of the 251 products audited in 2013, 43% featured some other information logo or statement of this type (compared to 51% in 2012). It is important to note that the vast majority of these logos and statements are not specifically health-related; they primarily encourage drinking responsibly or in moderation or direct consumers to manufacturer-specific information websites.

The most commonly observed non-DrinkWise logo was the ‘DrinkIQ.com’ logo, which was found on 8% of products overall and the most common plain text statement observed in 2013 on audited products included ‘drink responsibly’, which was found on 9% of products overall.

## Recommendations

The results of this study indicate that, despite some progress, after two years, the DrinkWise consumer information messages have still not been adopted across the majority of Australian alcohol product packaging. The biggest increases in DrinkWise labelling over the last 12 months appears to have been across spirit/mixed drink and wine products. There also appears to have been a shift away from using the generic ‘get the facts drinkwise.org.au’ logo on its own and towards a greater use of pregnancy-related DrinkWise messages. In terms of size and location, DrinkWise labels are also still not prominently displayed on alcohol product packaging.

[view the report](/wp-content/uploads/Alcohol-Label-Audit-September-2013.pdf)