# Alcohol product labelling: Health warning labels and consumer information

## Researcher

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (formerly the AER Foundation)

## Summary

This policy position paper provides a detailed proposal for the implementation of health warning labels and consumer information for all alcohol products sold in Australia.

The Foundation’s position paper explains that for health warning messages to be effective in both increasing awareness of the risks associated with alcohol consumption and changing drinking behaviours in the long-term, health warning messages should be specific and unambiguous, targeted at specific types of harm, and phrased in such a way that attracts the attention of the drinker. Further, for health warning labels to have optimal salience they need to be consistent in the style of text, colour,clearly defined borders, placement and orientation of health warning labels on alcohol product labels.

This position paper also proposes that the implementation of health warning labels should be complemented by a broader public education campaign to reinforce the health messages and provide further information to consumers. A good example is the effectiveness of tobacco product labelling and the associated public education campaigns which enhance the messages and images placed on product packaging.

Finally, this position paper seeks to examine the shortcomings in current food labelling laws in Australia as they pertain to alcohol. A series of proposals are made regarding mandating health warning labels and consumer information in order to ensure both adherence and consistency in implementation, thereby increasing the effectiveness of the labels in raising awareness and changing behaviours.

## Outcomes

The Foundation recommends the following:

### Health warning labels

* Health warning labels should be mandatory on all alcohol products and product packaging in Australia.
* There should be at least five different health warning messages and one of the health warning messages must relate to the risks of drinking alcohol during pregnancy. The warning messages should be rotated to ensure that consumers are exposed to a variety of messages.
* Health warning labels should comprise of both text and symbol. This will ensure that the health warning messages reach a broad audience and are understood by consumers with a range of literacy levels and consumers that come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
* The size, font and application of health warning labels should be consistent on all alcohol products.
* Health warning labels should be placed on the front of the alcohol product container, horizontally oriented and separated by a prominent black border.
* Health warning labels must occupy a specific percentage of the container’s surface, determined by the size of the container, product label size, and noticeability. A minimum size of font and label should be specified to ensure visibility.
* Health warning messages should be preceded by the text ‘HEALTH WARNING’.
* In order to target the largest number of people, health warning messages should cover a range of alcohol-related harms, including short-term and long-term harms,social harms, and the harms caused by alcohol to people other than the drinker.
* The implementation of health warning labels should be accompanied by a comprehensive public education campaign, using various forms of media.
* Health warning labels should be evaluated for their effect on attitudes and behaviours and should be reviewed at least every three years.

### Nutrition information panels

* Alcohol product labels should comply with nutrition labelling requirements of other foods and beverages, including a mandatory nutrition information panel and a list of ingredients. The label should include the energy content per 100 mL.
* Alcohol producers should be prohibited from including any positive health claims on their products, including representations of products as“low”in alcohol or low in calories.

[view the report](/wp-content/uploads/AER-Foundation-Policy-Position-Paper-Alcohol-Health-Warning-Labels.pdf)

[view examples of the proposed alcohol product labelling](/wp-content/uploads/Examples-of-Proposed-Alcohol-Health-Warning-Labels.pdf)