# Global health efforts jeopardised with big alcohol in the room

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International expert, Edinburgh University’s Professor Jeff Collin says a clear conflict of interest should rule out any partnership or involvement with the alcohol industry.

The UN’s 17 SDGs were produced to meet the urgent challenges facing the world and designed to be interlocking with success in one area expected to lead to success in another.

The goals include a strong commitment to global partnership and cooperation, including potentially damaging commitments to further trade liberalisation and, crucially, to extensive partnerships with the private sector. In the context of alcohol this could be seriously damaging to global health and sustainable development.

“The commitment to partnerships with the commercial sector could open the door to the alcohol industry and deliver it a seat at the table. The truth of course is the alcohol industry has no place being anywhere near the room. Its presence threatens to seriously undermine and compromise efforts to achieve the SDGs, including the key Goal 3 target to strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol,” Professor Collin said.

Professor Collin says that taking seriously conflict of interest with unhealthy commodity producers is critical to global health and sustainable development. This is recognised in tobacco, and increasingly in nutrition, but crucially not yet in alcohol.

“There are very clear rules on protecting health policy from tobacco industry interference, and the WHO is developing strong guidance on conflict of interest in nutrition policy, but there is nothing remotely equivalent for alcohol policy. This vacuum is fully exploited by the alcohol industry to undermine the development of effective policies. This is a major problem, very simply because the alcohol industry’s commercial interests do not, and will never align with health objectives at community, national or international levels” Professor Collin said.

GAPC Conference Keynote Speaker, Professor Rob Moodie AM, Professor of Public Health, University of Melbourne will also explore the manner in which the alcohol industry continues to threaten public health policy and programs in countries across the world.

“Attacking the science and the scientists, merchandising doubt and influencing the political agenda to protect its bottom line, the alcohol industry is relentless in its efforts to undermine proven public health initiatives that would ultimately save lives,” Professor Moodie said.

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) Chief Executive, Michael Thorn says the alcohol industry’s dirty tactics are equally a problem in Australia.

“It’s a global problem, but very much an issue in Australia as well, where we see examples almost every other week of an alcohol industry so desperate to resist government regulation, that it is prepared to dispute research that is indisputable, spread doubt when the evidence is clear, and manufacture false debate,” Mr Thorn said.

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