# How digital marketing of alcohol, gambling and junk food harms consumers

**The original article was posted on CHOICE, which can be** [**found here**](https://www.choice.com.au/consumers-and-data/data-collection-and-use/how-your-data-is-used/articles/online-ads-harmful-products-op-ed)**.**

There is no denying that digital technologies and devices – such as the internet, smartphones, and computers – are an integral part of our lives.

We all have the right to use digital technology safely.

But companies that sell harmful products and services such as alcohol, gambling and unhealthy food and beverages use these digital technologies to promote and market their products.

Every day millions of people across Australia, including children, are exposed to relentless digital marketing tactics that target their specific vulnerabilities, emotions and attributes. The consequences could be lifelong, determining the habits they form and the quality of life they can achieve.

Digital marketing for alcohol, unhealthy food and gambling reaches children at a very young age.

Here is the evidence.

Children, on average, spend 14 hours online each week. A [2020 VicHealth report](https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResearchandEvidence/Under-the-radar--Harmful-industries-digital-marketing-to-Australian-children.pdf) found that digital marketing for alcohol, unhealthy food and gambling reaches children at a very young age, affecting their attitudes, habits, consumption and health.

When it comes to alcohol, studies show that exposing children and young people to alcoholic product marketing increases the likelihood that they will start drinking earlier and at risky levels.

According to a [report](https://fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020-05-08-CCWA-FARE-An-alcohol-ad-every-35-seconds-A-snapshot-final.pdf) by Cancer Council WA and the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE), at the start of the pandemic in 2020, 107 sponsored alcohol advertisements were displayed on a personal Facebook and Instagram account in one hour on a Friday night. This meant that an alcohol advertisement was shown to an individual approximately every 35 seconds.

A [2021 report by Reset Australia](https://au.reset.tech/uploads/resettechaustralia_profiling-children-for-advertising-1.pdf) found how Facebook allowed advertisers to target young people on age-inappropriate interests, including alcohol, smoking, gambling and extreme weight loss.

There are currently limited protections in Australia to restrict these predatory marketing tactics.

After two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, the health and wellbeing of our families and communities is as important than ever. Therefore, as a community, we must do what we can to protect our families from harmful digital marketing practices by these companies selling harmful products.

There are currently limited protections in Australia to restrict these predatory marketing tactics. To support families in achieving good health and wellbeing, we need strong, evidence-based policies and government regulations to protect children and communities from digital marketing by harmful industries.

It's time to put the health of Australian children before the profits of harmful industries.

We need your support as we continue building our work to hold these companies accountable for the harm they cause.

Share your experience. [FARE](https://fare.org.au/harmful-alcohol-marketing-online/) has partnered with the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) to run a short survey to better understand community online marketing experiences for harmful products. Please complete this [short survey](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/harmfulproducts).