# WA takes positive lead on prohibiting alcohol health claims

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### For the first time in Australia a jurisdiction has prohibited alcohol companies from using false health claims to sell alcohol.

We are not the first to reflect that working in public health advocacy is akin to the slow, steady tortoise beating the hare in Aesop’s age-old fable. But every win that advances the public interest ahead of the alcohol industry is another win to celebrate.

FARE is pleased to share a notable policy win in Western Australia in relation to the state’s new framework for the promotion and advertising of alcohol.

In our submission to the WA review in August 2019, FARE included a recommendation for an additional principle that will help to stop false health claims in the advertising and promotion of alcoholic products.

WA has become the first Australian jurisdiction to have such an overt and enforceable reference to safeguard against misleading claims that alcohol has health benefits.

An existing principle in the WA Guidelines was amended to prohibit health claims in advertising, as recommended in FARE’s submission. It now reads:

#### Principle: The advertising or promotion must not suggest that the consumption/presence of liquor will improve physical/mental health or mood or cause or contribute to the achievement of personal, business, social, sporting, sexual or other success.

The Guideline also provides examples of “unacceptable practice”:

#### Advertisements that link alcohol consumption with winning a sports game, gaining a new business client etc.

#### Advertisements that suggest alcohol consumption will make someone happier, smarter, healthier etc.

The framing of this principle is important because for the first time in this country a jurisdiction has prohibited alcohol companies from using false health claims to sell alcohol.

In the past couple of years, alcohol marketers have attempted to push into the health consumer market, presumably in the hope of offsetting growing public awareness of the truth about the dangers of alcohol which is driving market change.

The alcohol industry spends a significant amount on advertising; the latest published data, from 2007, estimated annual alcohol advertising expenditure in Australia to be $128 million.[[i]](#_edn1) Large alcohol companies such as Diageo and AB InBev invest more in marketing (around 15 per cent) than their entire employee payroll costs (around 10–15 per cent).[[ii]](#_edn2)

[](https://drinktank.org.au/wp-content/uploads/dt-afends.jpg)

*In the future we can hope to see less of this, at least in WA. Source: Delicious.* [*Want a six-pack this summer? Here are 10 of the ‘healthiest’ beers*](https://www.delicious.com.au/drinks/beer/gallery/healthy-beers-australia-10-best-summer/171u74ca)*.*

The WA guidelines are a promising precedent for stronger regulations nation-wide. It also signals a shift in public awareness of the risk of cancer from alcohol.

The risk of breast, mouth, throat and oesophagus cancer is increased with any regular amount of alcohol consumption and continues to increase with every drink.[[iii]](#_edn3) Alcohol is also addictive like smoking. Research in the peer-reviewed [*BMC Public Health*](https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-019-6576-9) journal found the alcohol in one bottle of wine has the equivalent cancer risk of smoking five cigarettes for men and ten cigarettes for women.

But alcohol is worse than tobacco because of the range and magnitude of harms it causes to people other than the drinker, including violence on our streets and in our homes, vandalism, road traffic accidents, child maltreatment and neglect, and lost productivity in the workplace.[[iv]](#_edn4)

In Western Australia alone, there are 565 alcohol-attributable deaths and 16,387 alcohol-attributable hospitalisations every year.[[v]](#_edn5)

It’s no surprise then that the majority (78 per cent) of Western Australians feel that more needs to be done to reduce alcohol-related harm.[[vi]](#_edn6) FARE congratulates the WA Government for incorporating public health expertise into their new guidelines – another small but important step in the never-ending race to keep the community safer.

[[i]](#_ednref1) Australian Government Preventative Health Taskforce (2009). *Australia: The Healthiest Country by 2020*. Technical Report 3, Preventing alcohol-related harm, a window of opportunity. Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved 12/11/2018 from: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301635173_Preventing_alcohol-related_harm_in_Australia_A_window_of_opportunity>

[[ii]](#_ednref2) Institute of Alcohol Studies (2018). *The alcohol industry*. Retrieved 03/03/2020 from: <https://www.ias.org.uk/uploads/pdf/Factsheets/FS%20industry%20012018.pdf>

[[iii]](#_ednref3) World Cancer Research Fund/ American Institute for Cancer Research (2018). *Continuous Update Project Expert Report 2018: Alcoholic drinks and the risk of cancer*. Retrieved 08/08/2019 from: <https://www.wcrf.org/dietandcancer/exposures/alcoholic-drinks>; Bagnardi, V., Rota, M., Botteri, E., Tramacere, I., Islami, F., Fedirko, V., … La Vecchia, C. (2015). [Alcohol consumption and site-specific cancer risk: a comprehensive dose-response meta-analysis](https://www.nature.com/articles/bjc2014579). *British Journal of Cancer* 112, 580-593. doi:10.1038/bjc.2014.579; Loconte, N.K., Brewster, A.M., Kaur, J.S., Merrill, J.K. & Alberg, A.J. (2017). Alcohol and cancer: A statement of the American Society of Clinical Oncology. *Journal of Clinical Oncology* 35.

[[iv]](#_ednref4) Laslett. A-M., *et al.* (2010). *The range and magnitude of alcohol’s harm to others.* Melbourne: Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre, Eastern Health.

[[v]](#_ednref5) Lensvelt, E., Gilmore, W., Liang, W., Sherk, A. and Chikritzhs, T. (2018). *Estimated alcohol-attributable deaths and hospitalisations in Australia 2004 to 2015. National Alcohol Indicators, Bulletin 16*. Perth: National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University. Retrieved 08/08/2019 from: <https://ndri.curtin.edu.au/publications-resources/project-reports-and-bulletins/national-alcohol-indicators-bulletins>.

[[vi]](#_ednref6) Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (2019). *Annual Alcohol Poll 2019: Attitudes and Behaviours.* Canberra: Australia. Retrieved 01/08/2019 from: <https://fare.org.au/annual-alcohol-poll-2019-attitudes-and-behaviours/>.

### Metadata