# We need to talk about alcohol marketing and Mother's Day

*This article was* [*originally published on Women's Agenda*](https://womensagenda.com.au/life/womens-health-news/heres-to-the-wine-mums-we-need-to-talk-about-alcohol-marketing-and-mothers-day/).

About ten years ago I was at Parliament House in Canberra for meetings. At the time, I was the Policy Director at the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE).

I walked past the cafe where lobbyists tend to hang out and saw the in-house representative for a large beer company.

They came up and jokingly asked if I could help them with a research problem: “How do we get women to drink more beer?”

They thought this was funny.

I thought it told me a lot about their character.

I’ve reflected on this moment quite a bit lately as I’ve been bombarded with the annual marketing blitz urging me to buy Mum some alcohol this Mother’s Day. “Here’s to the Wine Mums”, toasts one online retailer.

What initially seemed like a “joke”, has become a significant pillar of the alcohol industry’s advertising strategy.

Companies are cynically commodifying the guilt, stress and exhaustion many women feel with the pressures of modern life, by selling alcohol as the cure.

We’ve all seen the mummy wine memes – where the joke is that mothers can’t get through the day without a bucket of savvy-b.

Rather than addressing the structural inequities that leave women shouldering a disproportionate share of child care and household labour, drinking has been rebranded as “self-care”.

During lockdown, we saw retailers engage big names to sell alcohol to mothers as a reward for surviving home schooling.

Unfortunately, the aggressive push by alcohol companies and retailers for women to view alcohol as a solution to the stresses of parenting is working.

[Research](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/16066359.2024.2314041) from La Trobe University’s Centre for Alcohol Policy Research found that women overloaded by competing demands of career and family are internalising feelings of guilt and fatigue, resulting in increasing alcohol use.

It also found that sophisticated, targeted marketing was presenting alcohol as a panacea for the stresses that mums face.

With unregulated use of data, [companies can now access an array of insights](https://fare.org.au/alcohol-marketing-online/) which tells them what stage of parenting a woman is at, whether she’s feeling the pressures of caring, exactly what alcohol she’s purchased in the past, and whether she’s accessing help for her drinking.

They can then use this data to target to women at the exact times and in the precise ways that their algorithms tell them will have maximum effect – which often means targeting the most vulnerable people in their most vulnerable moments.

The lack of controls on data use for the predatory and targeted marketing of addictive products is quite frankly frightening, and we’re already seeing the real life impacts.

Last year, Australia experienced its [highest rate of alcohol-induced deaths in a decade](https://fare.org.au/alcohol-induced-deaths-in-australia/) – another year-on-year increase – this time of more than nine per cent. The largest numerical increase in deaths was among women aged 45-64 years.

We’re seeing similar increases in alcohol liver disease, with Victorian [research](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-10-20/alcoholic-hepatitis-women-impacted-by-drinking/102962716) showing a three-fold increase in hospital admissions for women since the pandemic began.

Over the last six months, I’ve had four people share with me that they’ve lost a woman in their life in their 40s to alcohol.

These stories are heartbreaking, and they all involve young kids who are now living their lives without their mum.

This Mother’s Day, I don’t want a bottle of booze with ‘my amazing mama’ written on it.

I don’t want everyone in my life to be hit with targeted ads telling them that the gift I’d love is booze.

I want alcohol companies to stop trying to convince me and other mums that drinking is the answer to the pressures that we face.

 Better still, I’d love to see governments introduce common sense measures to make sure these companies can’t exploit the increased mental and caring load women carry, as a marketing tactic.