# Why we shouldn’t celebrate female empowerment with alcohol

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| **Date** | 2019-02-21 19:51:35 |
| **Categories** | Community stories  |

### Too many women are dying from alcohol-related breast cancer. The alcohol industry pretends to care about women's health and empowerment - but the truth is all they care about is their profits.

Too many women are dying from alcohol-related breast cancer in Australia.

Alcohol is a carcinogen.

Around 830 Australian women get alcohol-related breast cancer every year. That’s 76 soccer teams.

Of these women, roughly 144 will die. That’s 13 soccer teams every year. It’s also the equivalent of the whole AFL Women’s league in the inaugural season.

Unfortunately, only 16 per cent of Australians are aware that alcohol can cause breast cancer. Women have a right to know that no amount of alcohol is risk free when it comes to breast cancer; every drink increases your risk.

### The alcohol industry is targeting women as a growth market

The alcohol industry admits that it is targeting women as a growth market.

***Women are the booming segment for alcohol consumption, with wine their tipple of choice.”***

**Drinks Bulletin Australia’s fastest growing alcohol consumer April 11 2018.**

***Making your venue female-friendly and ensuring your marketing programs are appealing to women will show up in your online reviews, customer loyalty and bottom line”.***

**The Shout Is your venue truly customer centric? 28 June 2018.**

Mothers and professional women seem to be a particular focus of targeted marketing in the ‘wild west’ of social media, where alcohol marketers can do pretty much anything they like.

The alcohol industry pay female social media influencers to target women with positive messages about alcohol. These kinds of promotions often portray alcohol as an antidote to the stresses of motherhood, or align alcohol with women’s empowerment and equality.

This gives the impression that women are organically promoting alcohol to other women. But make no mistake, it’s men that are leading these companies. Take a look at the CEOs of the 10 largest alcohol companies:



Top row left to right: Carlos Brito, Anheuser-Busch InBev; Jean-François van Boxmeer, Heineken Holding; Akiyoshi Koji, Asahi Group Holdings; Yoshinori Isozaki, Kirin Holdings; Ivan Menezes, Diageo; Bottom row left to right: Takeshi Niinami, Suntory Holdings; Mark Hunter, Molson Coors Brewing; Alexandre Ricard, Pernod Ricard; Cees ‘T Hart, Carslberg; Baofang Li, Kweichow Moutai.

Alcohol companies also strategically align themselves with women’s issues such as breast cancer and the advancement of women in the workplace and in professional sport.

They exploit specific occasions such as Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Mother’s Day, Valentine’s Day and International Women’s Day as marketing opportunities. For example, In 2018, global alcohol giant Diageo launched ‘Jane Walker’, a limited edition of Johnnie Walker whisky, for International Women’s Day, with $1 USD of each purchase going to organisations supporting women’s causes. And Diageo is sponsoring the International Women’s Day 2019 campaign.

Wolf Blass are sponsoring the AFL Women’s league. They are cashing in on women’s success and empowerment to promote a product which killed the equivalent of every player in the AFL Women’s inaugural season.



Wolf Blass CEO (right) celebrates sponsorship deal with Norwood (AFL) Football Club

This behaviour serves as a PR exercise for the alcohol company while perpetuating a positive association between alcohol and women, and alcohol and breast cancer. It normalises alcohol consumption and can result in fewer people paying attention to the health risks.

#### While pretending to care, the alcohol industry is actively misleading the public about alcohol and breast cancer

A 2017 study led by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine analysed the accuracy of information about alcohol and cancer disseminated by the alcohol industry through “social aspects and public relations organisations” such as the Australian variant DrinkWise.

Most organisational websites (24 of 26), including DrinkWise, were found to contain significant omissions and/or misrepresentations of the evidence about the association between alcohol and cancer.

The researchers concluded that “the alcohol industry appears to be engaged in the extensive misrepresentation of evidence about the alcohol related risk of cancer” and that “breast cancer appeared to be a particular focus for this misrepresentation”.

Alcohol industry executives don’t care about female empowerment; they care about profit.

As women, we need to say no to alcohol sponsorship, and yes to better regulation of alcohol advertising.

This International Women’s Day, don’t celebrate female empowerment and equality with alcohol.

Take a stand against the alcohol industry instead, and tell them [#DontPinkMyDrink](https://twitter.com/search?q=%23Dontpinkmydrink&src=typd&lang=en).

### How much risk are we talking about?

For people drinking 20g alcohol/2 standard drinks a day (i.e. within the Australian long-term risk guidelines), their absolute risk of breast cancer is about 15 per cent which is three per cent higher than an abstainer. This means their risk of getting breast cancer has increased from 12 in 100 to 15 in 100 whilst drinking within the guidelines.

At almost 70g alcohol/7 standard drinks a day (slightly less than the average bottle of white wine ) the absolute risk of getting breast cancer is double that of an abstainer.

**This week Cancer Council Victoria launched the** [**Drink Less Live More**](https://www.cancervic.org.au/preventing-cancer/limit-alcohol/drink-less-live-more) **campaign highlighting the devastating link between alcohol and cancer, to help Australians make more informed decisions about what they drink.**

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| **Views** | 729 |