

Canberrans support action to prevent harm from alcohol sold online

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Canberrans are supportive of a range of measures to reduce harm from alcohol sold online, new data shows, as the ACT Government considers alcohol delivery reforms.

The vast majority of Canberrans backed not allowing alcohol companies to use push notifications prompting people to purchase alcohol (84.1%); mandatory ID verification when online (81%) and at the point of delivery (78.4%); specific RSA training for delivery drivers (74.1%); and limiting deliveries to before 10pm (50.1%).

Most Canberrans also supported strong penalties for companies that deliver alcohol to children (93.4%) and to people who are intoxicated (65.6%).

Ms Alex Bagnara, a Canberran whose friend died last year at the age of 46 from alcohol-related organ failure said that better controls are needed to protect people who are most at risk.

“I know that there would have been many occasions when my friend may not have been sold alcohol if he had had to go to a bar or a bottle shop, but companies could keep delivering endless amounts of alcohol to his home,” Ms Bagnara said.

“One day, my friend was enjoying time with his family and friends, and the next he was being told by doctors that he was palliative. His loss has been devastating for those who loved him.

“More needs to be done to hold alcohol companies to a higher standard when it comes to selling alcohol online.”

Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT (ATODA) CEO Anita Mills said the association supports tighter restrictions for online sale and delivery of alcohol as a harm reduction measure in the ACT community.

“We know that 40% of people seeking treatment in the ACT say alcohol is their primary drug of concern, making it the main reason that people reach out to alcohol and other drug treatment and rehabilitation services,” Ms Mills said.

“We need to make sure that laws are in place to address the increased risk that the delivery of alcohol presents to Canberrans. We also need to ensure that everyone who reaches out for help gets the support they need when they need it.”

FARE and ATODA are also seeking a two-hour safety pause between when an order for alcohol is placed and when it is delivered.

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) Chief Executive Caterina Giorgi said that action was needed, particularly at a time when alcohol induced deaths are at their highest rate in a decade.

“It is absolutely devastating to see the ways that alcoholic products cause so much harm to so many families and communities across Territory. Every person that dies because of alcohol is a life cut tragically short, leaving behind loved ones,” Ms Giorgi said.

About 60 people die in the ACT each year from alcohol-related disease or injury, and more than 1,500 people are hospitalised.

“When every phone is a bottle shop and alcohol companies spend millions of dollars marketing to people who are most at risk and this is left unchecked, we see unacceptably high levels of alcohol harm,” Ms Giorgi said.

“The ACT Government has an opportunity to introduce common sense measures that can prevent harm, that can save lives.

“Urgent action is needed to address the unchecked expansion of alcohol delivery, including limiting deliveries to before 10pm, ending aggressive digital marketing tactics and introducing a two-hour safety pause between when an order is made and when alcohol is delivered.”

The majority of poll respondents also backed ensuring kids’ online activity (89.8%) and anyone’s online activity (74.5%) is not collected to market alcoholic products; and strong penalties for alcohol companies that send ads to people who have opted out of their marketing.

More than a quarter (26.2%) had been delivered alcohol at their home in the previous 12 months.

FARE commissioned the Pure Profile survey of 503 Canberran adults between 25 August and 4 September 2023.

Interviews are available.

Media contact:

Dana Daniel
media@fare.org.au
0429 291 120

The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is the leading not-for-profit organisation working towards an Australia free from alcohol harms. We do this through developing evidence-informed policy, enabling people-powered advocacy and delivering health promotion campaigns.

FARE has been working with communities across the country to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians for 20 years. To learn more about us and our work visit www.fare.org.au.