

Government-led marketing standards needed to replace alcohol companies' sham advertising scheme

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Community groups and health advocates are calling for government-led, mandatory, and enforceable alcohol advertising standards to prevent harmful and unethical marketing, after alcohol companies and their lobby groups announced minor changes to their sham code.

Alcohol companies have been allowed to set their own marketing rules for decades, exploiting the many loopholes of their voluntary and consequence-free scheme to market their addictive products to children, young people, and people most at risk of harm.

Alcohol companies have announced superficial changes to the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC), which has proven to be – and will continue to be – ineffective.

In a report published on Friday the alcohol-company-run ABAC admits the so-called code, which has no legal standing or regulatory authority, has limited scope and that replacing it with enforceable marketing standards is “a matter for Australian governments and out of the scope of this Review”.

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) CEO Caterina Giorgi said alcohol advertising needs to be subject to independent oversight and rules that work to protect the health of children, families, and the broader community across traditional and digital media.

“No amount of tinkering with the unenforceable scheme, which is designed and overseen by alcohol lobbyists, will ever put the health and wellbeing of our community above the profits of alcohol companies,” Ms Giorgi said.

“Alcohol companies have for decades been allowed to hide behind the façade of a scheme that they run and fund which is riddled with loopholes, completely voluntary, has no legislative or regulatory basis and has no penalties for non-compliance. It is no wonder Australians are being bombarded with harmful alcohol marketing.”

The ABAC report admits that the alcohol-company-run code does not have any power to stop the marketing of alcoholic products while children are watching television or streamed content, or to protect people in the community who are at risk of harm from alcohol advertising.

“Alcohol companies and their lobby groups have delayed the introduction of meaningful standards for alcohol marketing by 20 years through setting up their sham scheme,” Ms Giorgi said.

“It’s now time for meaningful action. We need strong Government-led standards applied to alcohol marketing in Australia.

“These standards should represent community views on what is best for our health and wellbeing and include proper and enforceable penalties for companies who do the wrong thing.

“Under the current system, community complaints are too often dismissed. Even when breaches are upheld, there are no consequences because the code is completely voluntary.”

Government-led standards were important to protect the community's health and wellbeing, she said.

"When a child or young person is exposed to alcohol advertising, it puts them at risk of alcohol use from a younger age and more harmful patterns of alcohol use later in life. For people trying to avoid alcohol or who have experienced alcohol dependence, data targeting based on past purchasing can trigger cravings or relapse."

The ABAC announcement follows recent media reports highlighting the scheme's failure to protect children amid growing community concern.

FARE, along with dozens of other community leaders and health advocates, signed an open letter related to the review of the ABAC Scheme noting that [it is inherently flawed](#) for the alcohol companies to review themselves.

"Alcohol kills an Australian every 90 minutes and hospitalises another person every three-and-a-half minutes. We need to do more to stop this – addressing the harmful marketing used by alcohol companies is one way that we can prevent this."

Caterina Giorgi, CEO Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education is available for interview.

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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