



**ST VINCENT'S
HEALTH AUSTRALIA**

UNDER THE STEWARDSHIP OF MARY AIKENHEAD MINISTRIES

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Rev the Hon Fred Nile MLC
Committee Chairman, NSW Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No. 1
NSW Parliament House
Macquarie St
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Reverend Nile

SUBMISSION TO THE *INQUIRY INTO ALCOHOL BEVERAGES ADVERTISING PROHIBITION BILL 2015*

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the New South Wales (NSW) Government's *Inquiry into Alcohol Beverages Advertising Prohibition Bill 2015*.

St Vincent's Health Australia offers our support to the submission prepared by the NSW ACT Alcohol Policy Alliance (NAAPA) of which we are a member. NAAPA is a coalition of 48 organisations working to reduce alcohol-related harms by ensuring that evidence-based solutions inform alcohol policy discussions in NSW and the ACT.

In 2016, St Vincent's Health Australia released a policy statement on alcohol harm and violence, which includes recommendations to restrict advertising of alcohol products. Some further information on our position is below.

Australia's alcohol problem

Alcohol harm in Australia is significant. Alcohol is second only to tobacco as a leading preventable cause of death and hospitalisation.ⁱ

Every year in Australia more than 5,500 lives are lost and more than 157,000 people are hospitalised for chronic disease and injury caused by alcohol – that's 15 deaths and 430 hospitalisations *each day*. The burden of disease from alcohol grew by 62% over the decade to 2010.ⁱⁱ

Heavy drinking puts the drinker at significant risk of harm including injury and death, and long-term health issues. But the impact is wider than just those drinkers. All Australians share the costs of alcohol-related harm – as family members, friends, colleagues and taxpayers.

St Vincent's experience with alcohol-related harm

St Vincent's Health Australia operates two major tertiary public hospitals in New South Wales and Victoria. Every day, we treat the health impacts of harmful consumption of alcohol across the lifespan.

This includes:

- Disability and brain injury from early exposure to alcohol including harmful drinking in adolescence and maternal alcohol use in pregnancy.
- Injuries and trauma from alcohol-related accidents and violence (public and domestic) treated in our emergency departments, trauma wards, operating theatres and intensive care units.
- Chronic illness from long term alcohol consumption including cancers, heart and liver disease, cognitive impairment and dementia, and mental illness.

We have also delivered specialist alcohol dependence treatment services (residential and outpatient) for more than 50 years, making St Vincent's Australia's oldest public service of this kind.

Due to the location of our public hospitals near the entertainment and central business districts in both cities, St Vincent's Health Australia unfortunately has extensive experience with the impacts of alcohol-fuelled violence. We know first-hand that the flood of trauma and injuries presenting to our emergency departments as a result of alcohol is not only devastating for the victims of violence and their families, but comes at a huge cost to our hospital services and the community as a whole.

We also know that alcohol-related harm and violence can be prevented and its impact on all of us reduced. The evidence supporting policy change is compelling – the costs of doing nothing are very high; and the benefits of reducing harm substantial.

The voices of our senior clinicians are strong and in unison: as an organisation we have a responsibility to influence public policy at a system-wide level by sharing our experiences and offering informed, evidence-based guidance.

Alcohol advertising

Alcohol is one of the most heavily promoted products in the world.ⁱⁱⁱ Alcohol advertising contributes to the normalisation of alcohol use and reinforces the harmful drinking culture that currently exists in Australia.^{iv} International and national research has shown that exposure to repeat high-level alcohol promotion inculcates pro-drinking attitudes and increases the likelihood of heavier drinking.^v

Young people are particularly at risk of harm. Research shows a strong association between exposure to alcohol advertising and young people's beliefs, attitudes about alcohol and their drinking behaviour. In addition, the more alcohol advertising that young people are exposed to, the earlier they will start to drink, and the more they will consume if they already drink.^{vi, vii, viii} Further, ownership of alcohol branded merchandise among non-drinking children and adolescents predicts both early initiation to alcohol use and binge drinking.^{ix}

Alcohol marketing in Australia is more prolific than ever, with an unprecedented number of platforms for advertising including through social media and the sponsorship of sporting and cultural events. This pervasive nature of alcohol marketing is evidence of the ineffective regulation under the current Liquor Promotion Guidelines. Features that appeal to minors, sexualised advertising and heavy discounting remain problems in NSW.

There is also moderate but consistent evidence to suggest that point of sale promotions are likely to affect the overall consumption of underage drinkers, binge drinkers and regular drinkers.^x In Sydney takeaway liquor stores alone there is an average of 30 point of sale (POS) promotions at each outlet.^{xi} These promotions influence purchasing decisions and often result in individuals buying more alcohol than they planned to.^{xii}

There is significant community support for action to address alcohol advertising, with:

- 66 per cent of NSW adults support a ban on alcohol advertising on television before 8.30pm^{xiii}
- 53 per cent of NSW adults believe that alcohol sponsorship should not be allowed at sporting events^{xiv}
- 61 per cent of NSW adults believe alcohol advertising should be phased out of sporting broadcasts^{xv}
- Three-quarters of parents support the introduction of policies to restrict unhealthy food, beverage and alcohol sponsorship of children's and elite sports.^{xvi}

Thank you once again for the opportunity to raise these important issues with you.

Yours sincerely



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St Vincent's Health Australia



A/Prof Nadine Ezard
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ⁱ National Health and Medical Research Council (2009). Australian guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol. Commonwealth of Australia. {cited 2011 February 2} Available from: www.nhmrc.gov.au.

ⁱⁱ Gao, C., Ogeil, R.P., & Lloyd, B. (2014). Alcohol's burden of disease in Australia. Canberra: FARE and VicHealth in collaboration with Turning Point.

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- ^v Anderson P, Baumberg B. *Alcohol in Europe: a public health perspective. A report for the European Commission*. Institute of Alcohol Studies, UK; 2006
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- ^{xiii} Foundation for Alcohol Research Education (2017). *Annual Alcohol Poll: Attitudes and behaviours*. FARE: Canberra
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- ^{xv} Foundation for Alcohol Research Education (2017). *Annual Alcohol Poll: Attitudes and behaviours*. FARE: Canberra
- ^{xvi} Kelly B. *et al.* Views of children and parents on limiting unhealthy food, drink and alcohol sponsorship of elite and children's sports. *Public Health Nutrition* 16 (01): 130-135. 2013