Boycott of ASA Review of Alcohol Advertising—need for regulation

Sally Casswell, on behalf of the interim Board of Health Coalition Aotearoa

This open letter is in response to the Advertising Standards Authority’s (ASA) review of the Alcohol Advertising and Promotion Code. We will not be making a submission to this review.

The ASA is an industry body that develops voluntary advertising codes. However, voluntary codes have been ineffective at restricting alcohol marketing.

The alcohol industries in New Zealand rely on heavy drinking for profits. Almost half (48%) of alcohol in New Zealand is consumed in heavy drinking occasions as defined by the World Health Organization. Therefore, both alcohol and advertising industries have a strong conflict of interest in their self-regulatory role.

Alcohol marketing normalises alcohol use by its association with sporting teams and events, music festivals and charities; its placement in retail outlets, on hoardings, on television, in films and radio; and its prominence on social media platforms.

Voluntary advertising codes have failed to protect people from marketing techniques designed to increase alcohol’s appeal to them, such as the use of music, colour, characters, sound effects and brand logos. None of these techniques contravene the voluntary codes.

A recent study found New Zealand children were exposed to alcohol marketing four to five times per day on average. It also found Māori children were exposed to alcohol marketing more than five times as often as New Zealand European children. Internationally, more exposure is known to lower the age at which young people start drinking alcohol and to increase the amount they drink.

Alcohol advertising must be reduced to protect the public from its glamorising and normalising impacts.

This can only be achieved by the government putting in place regulation that restricts alcohol marketing. This action was recommended by the Law Commission Review of the Regulatory Framework for the Sale and Supply of Liquor in 2010, the Ministerial Forum on Alcohol Advertising and Sponsorship in 2014 and the Government Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction in 2019. It’s also strongly promoted by the United Nations as a cost-effective policy to reduce alcohol harm.

Competing interests:
Nil.

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