



MEDIA RELEASE

16 August 2011

Health groups coalition calls for mandatory alcohol labelling

A coalition of health agencies has today called for evidence-based health warnings on alcohol labels, supported by a government-funded public education campaign.

Alcohol Policy Coalition (APC) member, Todd Harper, CEO of Cancer Council Victoria, said the proposed labelling reforms would help to reduce the harms associated with alcohol use and should be made mandatory.

“In 2011 consumers deserve a better deal. A carton of milk contains more nutritional information than most alcohol products, and there is no information at all about the links between alcohol and cancer,” Mr Harper said.

Developed in consultation with leading Australian health researchers, the proposed warning labels contain messages such as drinking any alcohol can harm unborn babies, damage young brains and increase the risk of cancer.

“Including specific messages about the link between alcohol consumption and cancer would help inform consumers that alcohol is a carcinogen. A recent review of the evidence found that alcohol consumption is responsible for over 5,000 cancers in Australia each year, including one in five breast cancers. Yet when surveyed just 9% of Victorians could name alcohol as a risk factor for cancer,” said Mr Harper.

The APC backs calls by the AER Foundation that labels must be mandatory, government regulated and developed independent of the alcohol industry.

“We have seen industry’s bid to pre-empt compulsory alcohol labelling with the release last month of a series of weak and non-specific voluntary labels, devised by industry-funded body DrinkWise. Labels must be developed by health experts and regulated by government.”

Mr Harper said it was time to end the anomaly that exempts alcohol products from the labelling conditions imposed on all other food and beverage sold in Australia and to give consumers the information they need to exercise freedom of choice.

“It’s incongruous that a can of organic soup is required to list all ingredients and provide information such as kilojoule and sugar content, while a pre-mixed alcoholic energy drink is not required to have any nutrition information or health warnings at all.”

The Alcohol Policy Coalition recommends alcohol labels should:

- include text and graphic warnings about the range of health and safety risks of alcohol consumption,
- occupy at least 25 per cent of the package surface; and
- rotate with alternating specific, outcome-related health messages.

For media enquiries please contact Shona Clarke on 0415 992 565 or Renee Lustman on 0430 948 380

The Alcohol Policy Coalition is a collaboration of health agencies – Australian Drug Foundation, Cancer Council Victoria, Heart Foundation (Victoria), Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre and VicHealth – with shared concern relating to the misuse of alcohol and its health/social impacts on the community. www.alcoholpolicycoalition.org.au