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Time for action on alcohol labelling

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) has called on all Australian health ministers to take action on labelling of alcohol. Ministers, who meet in Queensland later this week, have the opportunity to take an important step in dealing with the harms associated with alcohol.

“This week we have had research released from the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) which shows overwhelming support for warning labels which identify the dangers of alcohol. This is particularly clear with regard to the harm associated with drinking alcohol when pregnant,” said Mr Michael Moore, the CEO of the PHAA.

“We would like to add the voice of the PHAA to so many health organisations that are concerned about the significant harms associated with alcohol use,” Mr Moore added.

It is now more than two years since the report of the Federal Government’s Preventative Health Taskforce which called for a widespread and coordinated action on alcohol. There has also been the more recent Blewitt Review on labelling of foods, *Labelling Logic*, which also called for warnings on alcohol products and was specific about drinking while pregnant.

The Taskforce warned of the growing increase in alcohol consumption in Australia and the harms associated. It identified the levels of use: “total per capita consumption of alcohol in Australia alcohol grew rapidly in the 1970s and has not returned to low levels since then; in 2007 it was estimated to be 9.88 litres of alcohol per capita” (National Preventative Health Taskforce 2009 – Key trends in alcohol consumption p5).

The Taskforce recognised that “while some interventions are more effective than others, there is no single strategy that can offer a ‘quick fix’ or ‘silver bullet’ to the prevention of harmful consumption of alcohol” (p38).

However, there are some measures that we know will be helpful. These include ensuring reduction in availability and increasing understanding of the harms that are associated with inappropriate use of alcohol. “This is why the PHAA and others are calling for urgent action on labelling of alcohol,” concluded Mr Moore.

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