

Media Release

AUSSIERS VOTE YES TO TACKLING ALCOHOL HARMS

28 July 2013: A new study measuring attitudes toward alcohol policy reforms has shown that a majority of Australians support a broad range of measures to reduce alcohol harms.

Reflecting heightened awareness and growing community concerns, the study found popular support for measures including restricting late trading (65.7%), guidelines on labels (66%), and limiting alcohol advertising on television (72.9%).¹

The findings come as the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) releases its *2013 Election Platform: 10 ways to reduce alcohol harms*.

FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn said the research puts paid to the tired industry line that alcohol misuse is not a concern for all Australians and claims industry influence and political weakness are the only factors preventing action being taken to reduce the toll.

"Alcohol use and its associated harms represent Australia's greatest preventive health challenge, but the way forward is clear. We know what works and what doesn't, and the voters have spoken time and again and said they support evidence-based reforms. If we are to reduce the growing alcohol toll, our political leaders must embrace the solutions we know will prevent and reduce alcohol harms," Mr Thorn said.

Those evidence-based solutions are highlighted in FARE's 2013 Election Platform.

Chief among those, FARE is calling on all parties to demonstrate leadership on alcohol policy, and to that end, has called for a banning of political donations from the alcohol industry and the development of a code of conduct on government engagement with industry.

Mr Thorn says the vast majority of Australians also want strong government leadership on alcohol, with recent polling showing that 75 per cent of people believe that Australia has a problem with excess drinking or alcohol abuse, and 74 per cent of Australians believe more needs to be done to reduce alcohol harms.²

“Australians want government to take strong action to address alcohol harms but unfortunately that won’t happen as long as government remains a prisoner to the demands of industry. A ban on political donations from the alcohol industry, and a change to the way government engages with industry would effectively break those chains,” Mr Thorn said.

FARE’s election platform also calls for the banning of alcohol industry sponsorship at sporting and cultural events to protect Australian children and adolescents from relentless alcohol marketing, the removal of the loophole that allows alcohol advertising on television before 8:30pm and the introduction of independent regulation of alcohol advertising.

Support for these measures is also seen in the latest research produced by the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research (CAPR).

The new study, *Australians attitudes toward alcohol policy: 1995-2010*, analysed data from the six National Drug Strategy Household Surveys (NDSHS) to 2010, the last of which surveyed over 26,000 Australians.

Between 2001 and 2010, support for limited alcohol advertising on TV until after 9:30pm rose 0.8 per cent to 72.9 per cent, while support for banning alcohol sponsorship of sporting events rose 4 per cent to 49.5 per cent.

Mr Thorn says alcohol marketing influences the age at which young people drink and the amount they consume.

“Vulnerable young Australians are being exposed to alcohol in more ways than ever before. In the face of increasing advertising platforms, the need for simple independent alcohol marketing regulation has never been greater,” Mr Thorn said.

FARE also argues for the introduction of mandatory alcohol pregnancy warning labels; a call echoed in the CAPR study with two thirds of Australians supporting the measure.

Mr Thorn says there is an urgent need for a mandated and consistently applied alcohol pregnancy warning label on all products available for sale in Australia.

“The government guidelines recommend that women abstain from alcohol during pregnancy. But this message has not been communicated to Australians, with one in five women continuing to consume alcohol during pregnancy. Mandatory alcohol pregnancy warning labels together with a comprehensive public health campaign would raise awareness of the significant harms that can result,” Mr Thorn said.

Mr Thorn says that in the face of significant and rising alcohol harms, the existence of effective evidence-based solutions and the majority support for alcohol policy reform, there is a compelling case for prioritising alcohol policy during the 2013 Federal Election.

"Australians don’t understand why the major parties continue to ignore rising alcohol harms. They rightfully question why governments refuse to adopt measures proven to be effective in reducing harms. Regardless of their voting intentions, a majority of Australians believe Governments need to do more to address this issue, and in the lead up to the Federal Election, we are calling on our political leaders to listen to their concerns," Mr Thorn said.

2013 Election Platform: 10 Actions to reduce alcohol harms

1. Develop a comprehensive national alcohol strategy with clear targets to reduce alcohol-related harms.
2. Tax wine as alcohol and remove taxpayer funded rebates that result in alcohol being sold for as cheap as 25 cents a standard drink.
3. Introduce mandatory alcohol pregnancy warning labels and raise awareness of the significant harms that result from alcohol consumption during pregnancy
4. Prevent and address the invisible disability caused by prenatal alcohol exposure by implementing The Australian Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Action Plan.
5. Enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to develop community led actions to address alcohol harms.
6. Safeguard Australian children and adolescents from the prolific promotion of alcoholic beverages by prohibiting alcohol industry advertising on television before 8.30pm and introducing independent regulation of alcohol marketing.
7. Protect Australian children and adolescents from incessant alcohol marketing at sporting and cultural events by banning alcohol industry sponsorship.
8. Support health professionals to talk to Australians about their alcohol consumption.
9. Ban political donations from the alcohol industry and develop a code of conduct on government engagement with industry.
10. Support evidence-based development of alcohol policy by addressing the gaps in alcohol data collection and research.

Key Findings: Australians attitudes toward alcohol policy: 1995-2010

Levels of support in 2010 for the following alcohol policy measures:

- limited advertising for alcohol on TV until after 9:30pm - 72.9%;
- requiring information on national drinking guidelines on all alcohol containers - 66.0%; and
- banning alcohol sponsorship of sporting events - 49.5%
- increasing the size of standard drink labels on alcohol containers - 62.9%

Michael Thorn is available for interview.

Media Contact: Jeremy Henderson 0425 559 710

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) is an independent, charitable organisation working to prevent the harmful use of alcohol in Australia. Since 2001, FARE has invested over \$115 million in research and community projects to minimise the impact of alcohol misuse on Australians. Through its national grants program and commissioned research, FARE has established itself as a leading voice on alcohol and other drugs issues. FARE works with community groups, all levels of government, police, emergency workers, research institutions and the private sector to address alcohol-related problems. For further information visit FARE's website: www.fare.org.au

¹ Callinan, S.C, Wilkinson, C, Livingston, M, Australian Attitudes Towards Alcohol policy 1995-2010, Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, July 2013

² Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education, FARE's 2013 Annual Alcohol Poll, April 2013, <http://www.fare.org.au/research-development/community-polling/annual-alcohol-poll-2013/>