

Australians overwhelmingly support health warnings on alcohol products

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Australians overwhelmingly support the introductions of health warning labels on alcohol products warning of harms including liver disease, alcohol poisoning and poor mental health, prompting calls by health and community organisations for them to be introduced.

A national poll of 1,004 people found 78% support the measure, while just 10.5% said they did not want health warnings on alcohol and 11.6% were not sure.

Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) President Dr Nicole Higgins said the findings confirmed that Australians want the facts about the harm alcohol causes to people's health.

"Everyone deserves to stay healthy and well, but alcoholic products contribute a heavy disease burden in Australia, and people need better information and support," Dr Higgins said. "GPs see alcohol's harm to people's health firsthand in their practices, and also observe how many patients are unaware of how many illnesses are linked with alcohol use."

Australian Medical Association (AMA) President Professor Steve Robson said clear health warning labels were needed so that people could make an informed choice about whether to consume alcohol products.

"The AMA has been calling for many years for alcohol products to have simple, clearly visible front-of-pack labels that warn consumers of the health risks of excess consumption," Professor Robson said.

"We know the harm alcohol does to people's health. Self-regulation and voluntary codes aren't working. We need serious measures to tackle the health, social, and economic harms of excess alcohol consumption.

"Warning labels on the effects of alcohol can help consumers make better choices, improving their health and reducing the pressures on the health sector that are directly related to excessive drinking."

Of those people surveyed who supported health warnings, 91.2% said the harms listed should include liver disease, while 68.3% wanted the warning to include alcohol poisoning and 68.7% said poor mental health should be included and 61.9% wanted the label to warn about the risk of heart disease.

More than half (54.5%) said the warning should include cancer and just under half (47.8%) wanted injury risk to be included.

Rachel Allen, whose 26-year-old son Dylan died from alcoholic liver disease in 2022, said health warning labels are needed to help all Australians, including young people, to understand the risk of harm from using alcohol.

"By knowing the risks involved, people can better determine what they are putting into their bodies and how this could affect their health detrimentally," Ms Allen said.

"I think Australians, especially young people, need to know that alcohol has the potential to destroy your life and my son is proof that it can take your life very young."

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education CEO Caterina Giorgi said health warning labels on alcohol are important at a time when harms from alcohol are increasing.

“We have just seen the latest data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics showing that deaths caused directly by alcohol have increased for the fourth consecutive year to hit their highest level in more than a decade,” Ms Giorgi said.

“Every one of these deaths represents the loss of a member of our community, someone with family and friends who have been left devastated by a preventable loss of life.

“Clear information about the harm alcohol cause to people’s health and wellbeing needs to be presented on these products’ labels, to counter the relentless alcohol company marketing we in the community are exposed to every day.”

Media contact:

Dana Daniel

media@fare.org.au

0429 291 120