

STRONGER CONSUMER PROTECTIONS NEEDED IN DIGITAL REFORM

7 March 2019: All alcohol advertisements should carry a health warning to provide greater protection for consumers – in particular to guard the right of children to safely interact in the digital world.

[FARE's submission into the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission \(ACCC\) review of digital platforms](#) has exposed the lack of consumer protections, and FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn is calling for accelerated reform as one of [FARE's national election priorities released today](#).

"Digital media platforms are havens for marketers; a lawless 'wild west' where they target children and other vulnerable audiences with advertisements for harmful commodities, especially alcohol," FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn said.

Mr Thorn says there is clear evidence that population groups such as children, dependent drinkers, and those in emotionally vulnerable situations, are especially susceptible to alcohol advertising.

"The evidence shows that for young people, exposure to alcohol marketing leads them to commence drinking at an earlier age and increases their likelihood of consuming more alcohol, especially binge drinking," Mr Thorn warned.

Mr Thorn says alcohol marketers deliberately capitalise on this evidence; exploiting the current lack of restrictions on alcohol advertising in the digital ecosystem, which is conducive to recruiting young drinkers.

"As well as being cheaper than traditional media, digital platforms enable direct consumer marketing that is difficult to monitor," he said.

Mr Thorn says marketing content has developed in sophistication, increasing the need for stronger and new protections against unethical practices.

"It's clear that marketing agencies are able to buy children's data and use that information to target them with advertisements. This raises serious questions about the monetisation and use of minors' data," Mr Thorn said.

Marketing techniques, such as using interactive games and social media influencers, have also blurred the lines between advertising and content.

"The World Health Organization has warned about such highly appealing tactics which bypass any media literacy that young people might have to identify the advertising being pushed to them," Mr Thorn said.

Mr Thorn says the ACCC's media reform process is an opportunity to finally introduce a recommendation to mandate the use of health advisory information on all forms of alcohol advertising.

"In 2014, the Australian Government's National Preventative Health Taskforce recommended that all alcohol advertising have health information or counter advertising, and this is one of the issues addressed in FARE's Election Platform 2019," Mr Thorn said.



“FARE’s ‘election ask’ for an incoming government is to mandate the use of health advisory information on all forms of alcohol advertising, occupying a minimum of 20 per cent of the advertising broadcast time or physical space,” he said.

Mr Thorn says the overwhelming majority of Australians want to know more about the risks and long-term health implications of drinking alcohol.

“FARE’s annual alcohol poll tells us that the majority of Australians feel they are in the dark when it comes to the risk of long-term harm from drinking alcohol – with 84 per cent agreeing that they have a right to this information,” Mr Thorn said.

“With millions and millions of Australians now watching content on digital platforms, FARE says we cannot wait for another election cycle to take decisive action to provide information that informs and protects consumers,” he said.

FARE ELECTION PLATFORM 2019: PROTECT FAMILIES FROM ALCOHOL HARM

1. Inform consumers about the long-term health effects of drinking alcohol:
 - Provide \$100m over four years for a strong and consistent public awareness campaign to communicate the risk of long-term health effects of alcohol
 - **MANDATE THE USE OF HEALTH ADVISORY INFORMATION ON ALL FORMS OF ALCOHOL ADVERTISING, OCCUPYING A MINIMUM OF 20 PER CENT OF THE ADVERTISING BROADCAST TIME OR PHYSICAL SPACE.**
2. Prevent lifelong disability by stopping alcohol use during pregnancy:
 - Provide \$10m over four years for a national campaign to raise awareness of the need to abstain from alcohol use during pregnancy
 - Invest in the National Disability Insurance Scheme to provide equitable access for people with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and their carers, and to prevent secondary disabilities and disadvantage.
3. Reduce alcohol-fuelled family violence through actions that address alcohol as a risk factor:
 - Include specific actions in the Fourth Action Plan on family violence in order to reduce the severity and frequency of alcohol’s involvement in family violence incidents and ensure women and children’s safety.
4. Protect children and young people from alcohol advertising:
 - Lift the exemption to time-based restrictions of alcohol advertising on free-to-air television to prevent children being exposed
 - Introduce effective regulation to ensure that children using online spaces are protected from exposure to alcohol advertising and marketing
 - Establish an independent regulator of alcohol advertising free of industry involvement to regulate content and placement and carry out enforcement.

Mr Thorn is available for media interviews. Contact Clare Ross 0429 291120