



MEDIA RELEASE

GOVERNMENT MUST RAISE BAR ON ALCOHOL ADVERTISING STANDARDS ON ALL PLATFORMS

18 September 2015: The Commonwealth Government is being urged to establish an independent review of Australia's broadcast and digital alcohol advertising guidelines.

The call follows the release of new research which has revealed the extent to which children and adolescents are exposed to alcohol advertising when watching Australia's major televised sporting codes, Australian Football League (AFL), Cricket and National Rugby League (NRL).

It found that an estimated cumulative audience of 26.9 million Australian children and adolescents watching these sports are exposed to 51 million instances of alcohol advertising, with nearly half (47%) of these broadcast during daytime programming between 6am and 8.30pm.

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) Chief Executive, Michael Thorn says the latest research has once again demonstrated that existing alcohol advertising regulations are not protecting Australian children from exposure to unhealthy advertising during prominent televised sports.

"As NRL and AFL footy finals get underway, the egregious loophole that allows alcohol advertising to be broadcast during live sporting broadcasts in the daytime on weekends and public holidays continues to expose millions of Australian children and adolescents to high levels of alcohol advertising. And research shows that alcohol promotions are linked to an increase in the likelihood that young people will start to drink, and increases in the amount they are drinking," Mr Thorn said.

The research comes as FreeTV Australia moves to relax its own advertising code to allow for even more alcohol advertising on TV.

Mr Thorn says further weakening the FreeTV Australia code would be a backward and enormously damaging step.

"FreeTV argues that because there are few alcohol advertising controls on Pay TV and online media, its members are at a significant commercial disadvantage. However, lowering the bar further on an already broken system is clearly not the answer. What we must do is tighten the alcohol advertising guidelines and lift the advertising standards across all media including Pay TV and online platforms," Mr Thorn said.

Currently there are no comparable restrictions determining when alcohol advertising can be broadcast on Pay TV.



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Mr Thorn says there is no rationale for subscription television being subject to different restrictions to those applied to free-to-air television, and that the same evidence and rationale for limiting alcohol advertising must be applied to all forms of media, Pay TV and beyond.

“The current self-regulatory alcohol advertising codes have not only failed to protect children and adolescents from exposure to alcohol messages, but have failed miserably to protect consumers of all ages from inappropriate alcohol advertising. The codes have also failed to keep up with the rapidly shifting traditional and digital landscape. A government-instigated review could cut through the complexity, identify and resolve those failings and recommend the introduction of an effective regulatory alcohol advertising regime,” Mr Thorn said.

The results of the study, [*Child and adolescent exposure to alcohol advertising in Australia’s major televised sports*](#), are published in the Drug and Alcohol Review journal.

Michael Thorn (@MichaelTThorn) is available for interview.

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The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to stop the harm caused by alcohol. Alcohol harm in Australia is significant. Over 5,500 lives are lost every year and more than 157,000 people are hospitalised making alcohol one of our nation’s greatest preventative health challenges.

For over a decade, FARE has been working with communities, governments, health professionals and police across the country to stop alcohol harms by supporting world-leading research, raising public awareness and advocating for changes to alcohol policy. In that time, FARE has helped more than 750 communities and organisations, and backed over 1,400 projects around Australia.



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Explanatory note: The current ‘regulation’ of alcohol advertising

The regulation of advertising in Australia occurs through a myriad of industry codes with the Alcohol Beverages Advertising (and Packaging) Code (ABAC) having responsibility for the ‘content’ of alcohol advertisements. Other industry codes cover the ‘placement’ of broadcast alcohol advertising through specific provisions or rules that advertisers must comply with when advertising alcohol.

This complex arrangement of regulatory codes means that there is no one central body with responsibility for the content and placement of alcohol advertising. This is a significant flaw in the current system. The following information provides an overview of the current controls on alcohol advertising on commercial and subscription television and the internet.

Commercial television (free to air)

- Content of alcohol advertising is the responsibility of the ABAC.
- The placement of alcohol advertising is controlled under the *Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice*.
- The *Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice* does not permit alcohol advertisements during M classification zones. The M classification zones are:
 - > weekdays (school days) from 8.30pm to 5.00am and 12 noon to 3pm
 - > weekends and school holidays: 8.30pm to 5.00am.
- Alcohol advertising is permitted “as an accompaniment to the live broadcast of a sporting event on weekends and public holidays”.ⁱ

Subscription television (Pay TV)

- Content of alcohol advertising is the responsibility of the ABAC.
- The placement of alcohol advertising is controlled by the *Australian Subscription Television and Radio Association Codes of Practice 2013: Subscription Television Broadcast*.
- There are no timing controls on alcohol advertising on subscription television.
- The *Australian Subscription Television and Radio Association Codes of Practice 2013: Subscription Television Broadcast* states that “The Licensee must take into account the intellectual and emotional maturity of the intended audience of the channel when scheduling advertisements”.ⁱⁱ

Internet

- Content of alcohol advertising is the responsibility of the ABAC.
- There is currently no regulation that restricts the placement of alcohol advertisements on the internet.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ Commercial Television Industry (2013). *Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice*

ⁱⁱ Australian Subscription Television and Radio Association (2013) *ASTRA Codes of Practice 2013: Subscription Television Broadcast*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Australian National Preventive Health Agency (2013). *Alcohol advertising: the effectiveness of current regulatory codes in addressing community concern: draft report*. Commonwealth of Australia.