



# Advocacy Monitor: 2012-2013 Brief report

HEALTH PROMOTION EVALUATION UNIT

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## Introduction

Healthway has long had a strong interest in unhealthy behaviours and how they are promoted to the Western Australian population through sponsorships and other marketing activities (Corti et al. 1995). An area of particular interest is sport as a conduit for the communication of healthy and unhealthy messages, including messages disseminated in the context of both professional and amateur teams and events (Healthway 2012).

The association of unhealthy behaviours with sports is problematic because of the potential positive associations that can be created between these two phenomena and the resulting normalisation of sub-optimal behaviours (McDaniel and Mason 1999). As a result, there has been increasing concern in recent years relating to the sponsorship of sport by fast food and alcohol companies (Hastings and Sheron 2011; Kelly et al. 2012). Of particular concern is that sports sponsorship offers a mechanism for bypassing advertising regulations in order to access child audiences (Nicholson & Hoye 2009). Recent Australian research has found that sports sponsorship at both elite and club levels can make children's attitudes to unhealthy products more favourable (Kelly et al. 2011a, 2012).

Recently, gambling messages appear to have become prevalent during televised sporting events in Australia (Thomas et al. 2012a, 2012b). This is an additional area of concern given children's exposure to these programs and the potential to further normalise the association between sport and gambling among the next generation.

Following on from previous Healthway-funded research that has investigated adults' attitudes to the sponsorship of community and sporting events by food and alcohol companies (Ferguson and Rosenberg 2011; Pescud, Rosenberg, Ferguson, and Houghton 2012) and children's implicit assimilation of sports sponsorship messages (Pettigrew, Rosenberg, Ferguson, Houghton, and Wood 2013), a new study was developed to explore in more detail public perceptions of sponsorship activities undertaken by companies promoting unhealthy products. This study expanded on previous work in this area by including Western Australians' attitudes to gambling companies sponsoring community and sporting events. This facilitated a broader analysis of Western Australians' perceptions of appropriate public places for unhealthy products to be promoted.

## Method

Data were collected at seven Healthway-sponsored events between June 2012 and January 2013. Adults were approached to complete a brief self-administered survey. Upon verbal consent, the survey was handed to the respondent and collected once they had finished.

The survey comprised questions relating to the sponsorship of community events, elite sports, and children's sport by companies promoting gambling, alcohol, and unhealthy food and drink products. Specifically, the survey used a five-point scale (very unconcerned, unconcerned, neutral, concerned, very concerned) to measure respondents' level of concern for each scenario (e.g. the sponsorship of elite sports by gambling companies, the sponsorship of elite sports by unhealthy food and drink companies, etc.). The survey also used a five-point scale (not at all supportive, not supportive, neutral, supportive, very supportive) to investigate respondents' level of support for policies that restrict these types of sponsorships. Open-ended questions were used to capture respondents' views about any potential consequences such policies might have. In addition, demographic information was collected such as age, gender, socio-economic status (SES),

and whether or not the respondent had a child under the age of 15 years (parental status).

The data were analysed using SPSS for Windows (version 21). Socioeconomic status was assessed using residential postcode and the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (ABS 2006). Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the level of concern for the various sponsorships; the level of support for, and perceived potential consequences of, various restrictive policies; and the demographic variables. Chi square analyses were conducted to measure differences in the level of concern (categorised as concerned vs. neutral/unconcerned) and support (categorised as supportive vs. neutral/not supportive) by age group, SES, gender, and parental status. In addition, multiple repeated measures ANOVA were conducted to investigate differences in the mean score for concern and support across the three sponsorship categories (unhealthy food /drink companies, alcohol companies, and gambling companies). Further repeated measures ANOVA models tested for differences in concern across the various settings (community events, elite sports, and children's sports). All ANOVA models adjusted for age group, SES, gender, and parental status.

## Results

Of the 209 respondents who completed the survey, 60% were female and 46% were aged 30-49 years. Approximately half (46%) indicated they had a child less than 15 years of age and most were classified into the high SES category (66%) (Table 1).

**Table 1: Sample demographics**

	n (209)	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	82	39.8
Female	124	60.2
<b>Age Group</b>		
15-29 years	56	27.3
30-49 years	95	46.3
50+ years	54	26.4
<b>Child under 15 years</b>		
Yes	94	45.9
No	111	54.1
<b>SES</b>		
Low	13	7.1
Medium	49	26.8
High	121	66.1

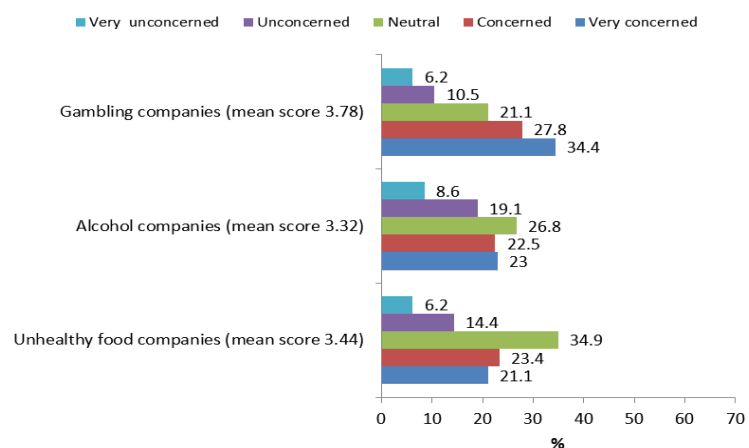
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### Concern about sponsors of community events

Respondents were asked to indicate how concerned or unconcerned they were about gambling, alcohol, and unhealthy food and drink companies sponsoring community events. As displayed in Figure 1, almost two-thirds of respondents reported being concerned (62%) about gambling companies sponsoring community events, and almost half indicated being concerned about alcohol (46%) and unhealthy food/drink companies (44%) sponsoring community events. Around one in three (35%) reported neutral feelings towards the sponsorship of community events by unhealthy food/

drink companies, around one in four (27%) reported neutral feelings relating to sponsorship by alcohol companies, and one in five (21%) reported neutral feelings relating to sponsorship by gambling companies. Respondents' level of concern about gambling companies sponsoring community events was significantly higher (mean 3.78) than the levels of concern about sponsorship by unhealthy food/drink companies (mean 3.44,  $p < 0.01$ ) and alcohol companies (mean 3.32,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Significant differences were observed by age group. Specifically, younger respondents were significantly less likely than older respondents to be concerned about these types of companies sponsoring community events. For alcohol companies, 21% of 15-29 year olds were concerned or very concerned versus 52% of 30-49 year olds ( $p < 0.01$ ) and 59% of 50+ year olds ( $p < 0.01$ ). For unhealthy food/drink companies, 30% of 15-29 year olds were concerned or very concerned compared to 47% of 30-49 year olds ( $p < 0.05$ ) and 56% of 50+ year olds ( $p < 0.01$ ). Finally, for gambling companies, 48% of 15-29 year olds were concerned or very concerned compared to 67% of 30-49 year olds ( $p < 0.05$ ) and 72% of 50+ year olds ( $p < 0.05$ ).



**Figure 1: Level of concern about the sponsorship of COMMUNITY EVENTS by gambling (n=209), alcohol (n=209), and unhealthy food/drinks companies (n=209).**

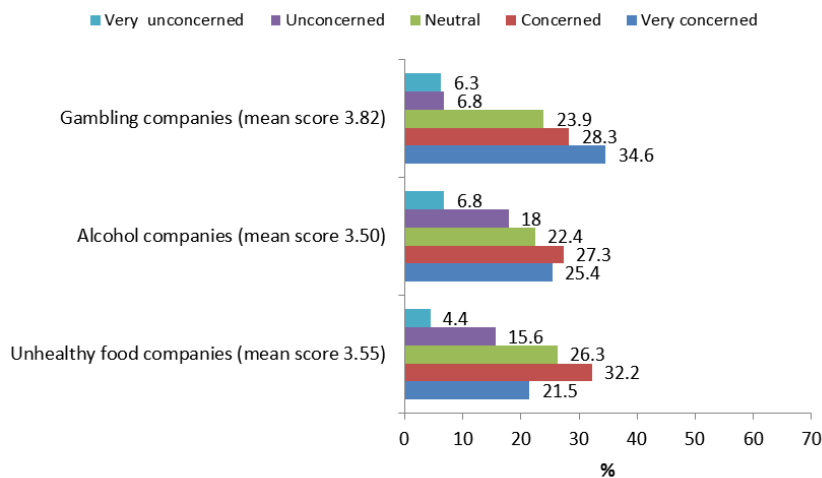


Figure 2: Level of concern about the sponsorship of ELITE SPORTS by gambling (n=205), alcohol (n=205), and unhealthy food/drinks companies (n=205).

A significantly higher proportion of respondents who had a child under the age of 15 years (55%) compared with those who did not (37%) were concerned about the sponsorship of community events by companies that sell alcohol ( $p < 0.01$ ). No significant differences were observed by gender or SES.

### Concern about sponsors of elite sports

Respondents' feelings about gambling, alcohol, and unhealthy food and drink companies sponsoring elite sports were also investigated. Figure 2 shows that almost two-thirds of respondents indicated some level of concern (63%) about gambling companies, and over half were concerned about alcohol (53%) and unhealthy food/drink companies (54%) sponsoring elite sports. Approximately one quarter of respondents reported neutral feelings about the sponsorship of elite sports by gambling companies (24%), alcohol companies (22%), and unhealthy food/drink companies (26%). Respondents' level of concern about gambling companies sponsoring elite sports was significantly higher (mean 3.82) than the level of concern about sponsorship by unhealthy food/drink companies (mean 3.55,  $p < 0.01$ )

and alcohol companies (mean 3.50,  $p < 0.01$ ).

As was the case with event sponsorship, significantly fewer younger respondents were concerned about gambling and alcohol companies sponsoring elite sports compared with older respondents. For gambling companies, 47% of 15-29 year olds were concerned or very concerned compared to 67% of 30-49 years olds ( $p < 0.05$ ) and 71% of 50+ year olds ( $p < 0.05$ ). For alcohol companies, 38% of 15-29 year olds

were concerned or very concerned compared to 59% of 30-49 year olds ( $p < 0.05$ ) and 60% of 50+ year olds ( $p < 0.05$ ). However, there were no age differences for unhealthy food and drink companies. In addition, no significant differences were observed by gender, SES, or parental status.

### Concern about sponsors of children's sports

Respondents' feelings about the sponsorship of children's sport by these types of companies were also investigated. As presented in Figure 3, the majority of respondents reported being concerned about gambling companies (77%), alcohol companies (75%), and unhealthy food/drink companies (65%) sponsoring children's sport. Approximately one in five respondents (22%) indicated neutral feelings about the sponsorship of children's sports by unhealthy food/drink companies, and around one in ten reported neutral feelings about sponsorship by alcohol (11%) and gambling (12%) companies. Although high levels of concern were observed for all three sponsorship types, the level of concern toward gambling companies sponsoring children's sport was, again, significantly higher (mean 4.12) than the level of concern

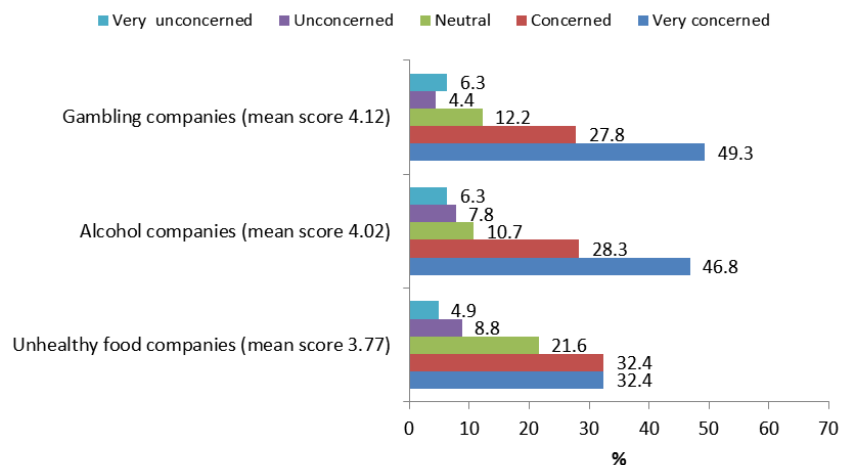
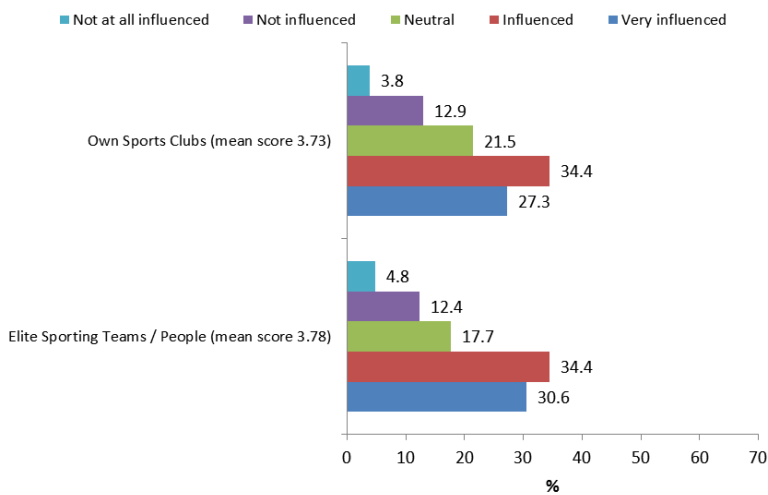


Figure 3: Level of concern about the sponsorship of CHILDREN'S SPORT by gambling (n=205), alcohol(n=205), and unhealthy food/drinks companies (n=204).



**Figure 4: Influence on CHILDREN of companies that sell unhealthy products when sponsoring children's sports clubs (n=209) and when sponsoring elite sporting teams or people (n=209).**

about sponsorship by alcohol companies (mean 4.02,  $p < 0.01$ ) and unhealthy food/drink companies (mean 3.77,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Significantly fewer younger respondents than older respondents were concerned about alcohol companies sponsoring children's sports. Around two-thirds (64%) of 15-29 year olds were concerned or very concerned compared to 79% of 30-49 year olds ( $p < 0.05$ ) and 83% of 50+ year olds ( $p < 0.05$ ). No significant age differences were observed for the other industry categories, or by gender, SES, or parental status.

#### Perceived influence of unhealthy food/drink sponsors on children

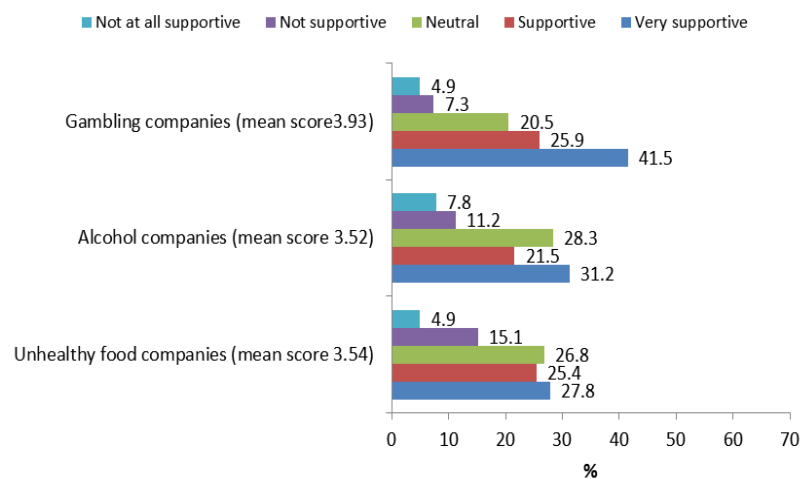
When asked about the level of influence that companies promoting unhealthy products have over children when they sponsor children's sports clubs, 27% of respondents believed children were very influenced and a further 34% believed they were influenced by the sponsorship. Similar results ( $p > 0.05$ ) were found for the sponsorship of elite sports – 34% very influenced and 31% influenced (Figure 4). No significant differences were observed by age, gender, SES, or parental status.

#### Level of support for policies that restrict gambling, alcohol, and unhealthy food/drink sponsors

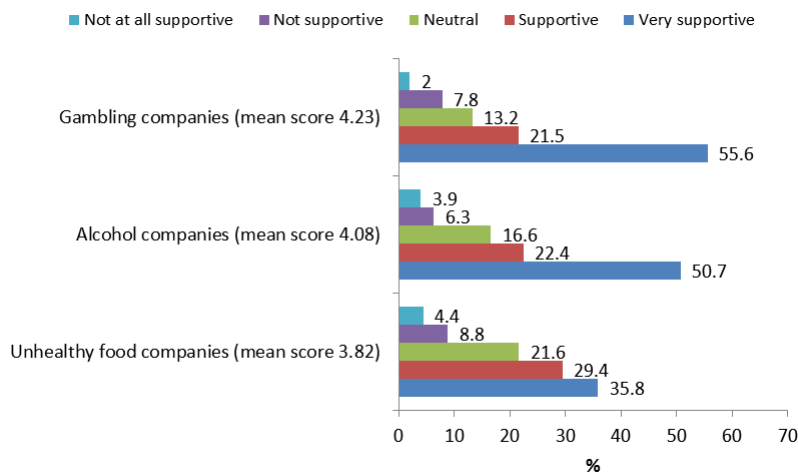
Respondents were asked to indicate their level of support for the introduction of policies that restrict gambling, alcohol, and unhealthy food and drink companies from sponsoring elite sports. As displayed in Figure 5, 67% of respondents supported policies that restricted sponsorship of elite sports by companies that promote gambling, 53% supported restrictions on those promoting alcohol, and 53% supported restrictions on

those promoting unhealthy food/ drinks. Approximately one quarter of respondents (28%) reported neutral feelings towards policies that restrict alcohol companies and unhealthy food/drink companies from sponsoring elite sports, with one in five (20%) indicating a neutral position on the sponsorship of elite sports by companies that promote gambling. Respondents' level of support for policies that restrict gambling companies from sponsoring elite sports was significantly higher (mean 3.93) than the level of support for policies that restrict sponsorship by unhealthy food/drink companies (mean 3.54,  $p < 0.01$ ) and alcohol companies (mean 3.52,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Significantly fewer younger respondents were supportive of a policy that restricts gambling and alcohol companies from sponsoring elite sports compared with older respondents. For gambling companies, 48% of 15-29 year olds supported restrictions compared to 73% of 30-49 year olds ( $p < 0.01$ ) and 81% of 50+ year olds ( $p < 0.01$ ). For alcohol companies, 32% of 15-29 year old respondents supported restrictions compared to 61% of 30-49 year olds ( $p < 0.01$ ) and 60% of 50+ year olds ( $p < 0.01$ ).



**Figure 5: Support for policies that restrict the sponsorship of ELITE SPORT by gambling (n=205), alcohol (n=205), and unhealthy food/drinks companies (n=205).**



**Figure 6: Level of support for policies that restrict the sponsorship of CHILDREN'S SPORT by gambling (n=205), alcohol (n=205), and unhealthy food/drinks companies (n=204).**

A significantly higher proportion of respondents who had a child under the age of 15 years (62%) compared with those who did not (46%) were in support of a policy that restricts companies that sell alcohol from sponsoring elite sports ( $p < 0.05$ ). No significant differences were observed by gender or SES.

A similar question was asked in relation to the introduction of policies that restrict these types of companies from sponsoring children's sports. Figure 6 shows the majority of respondents were in support of policies that restrict companies that promote gambling

(77%), companies that sell alcohol (73%), and companies that sell unhealthy food/drink (65%) from sponsoring children's sports. Approximately one in five (22%) indicated a neutral position on the sponsorship of children's sports by companies that sell unhealthy food/drinks. Lower levels of neutrality were found in relation to sponsorship by alcohol (17%) and gambling (13%) companies. Respondents' level of support for policies that restrict gambling companies from sponsoring children's sports was significantly higher (mean 4.23) than the level of support for policies that restrict sponsorship by alcohol companies (mean 4.08,  $p < 0.01$ ) and unhealthy food/drink companies (mean 3.82,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Significantly fewer younger respondents were supportive of a policy that restricts gambling and alcohol companies from sponsoring children's sports compared to older respondents. For gambling companies, 67% of respondents aged 15-29 years supported restrictions compared to 82% of 30-49 year olds ( $p < 0.05$ ). For alcohol companies, 59% of those aged 15-29 years supported restrictions compared to 78% of 30-49 year olds ( $p < 0.05$ ) and 83% of 50+ year olds ( $p < 0.01$ ). There were no significant age differences for companies promoting unhealthy foods/drinks. Further, there were no significant differences observed by gender, SES, or parental status for all three types of companies.

**Table 2: Potential consequences of preventing unhealthy food and drink companies from sponsoring children's sport\* (n=156)**

	n	%
children would eat healthier/be healthier/be more active/health important/less childhood obesity/less childhood diabetes	62	39.7
possibly less money from other sponsors/reduced sponsorship/less activities	52	33.7
less indoctrination/less influence on kids to eat unhealthy products	18	11.5
probably a marginal effect only/little benefit	14	9
it would create a positive opportunity for other organisations to take on the sponsorship	6	3.8
neutral comment	4	2.6

\*missing values excluded

**Table 3: Potential consequences of preventing alcohol companies from sponsoring children's sport\* (n=151)**

	n	%
less indoctrination/ less influence on kids /no alcohol /less social acceptance/ less brand recognition	51	33.8
possibly less money from other sponsors/reduced sponsorship/less activities	28	18.5
alcohol has no place in children's sport/totally inappropriate so shouldn't be allowed	21	13.9
less underage/binge drinking	14	9.3
alcohol companies don't sponsor children's sport	6	4
marginal/little benefit	6	4
sends the message that alcohol and sport don't mix	5	3.3

\*missing values excluded

Respondents were asked to write down any potential consequences (positive or negative) of preventing unhealthy food/drink companies and alcohol companies from sponsoring children's sports. Table 2 presents the most commonly reported potential consequences of preventing unhealthy food/drink companies from sponsoring children's sport and Table 3 presents the reported potential consequences of preventing

alcohol companies from sponsoring children's sport.

In both instances, respondents highlighted a positive consequence most frequently. In the case of unhealthy food/drink sponsors, the most common anticipated outcome was a likely health benefit to children (40%), and in the case of alcohol sponsors it was less influence/exposure of children to alcohol (34%). The potential loss of money for the clubs due to lower sponsorship dollars was highlighted as the most common negative potential consequence of preventing unhealthy food/drink sponsors (34%) and preventing alcohol sponsors (18%).

#### **Level of concern about sponsorship types across settings (children's sport, elite sport, community events)**

Overall, the level of concern regarding sponsorship by unhealthy food/drink companies was significantly higher at children's sports (mean 3.77) compared with elite sports (mean 3.52,  $p < 0.01$ ) and community events (mean 3.41,  $p < 0.01$ ). A similar pattern was observed for the level of concern regarding sponsorship by alcohol companies, with the mean score significantly higher at children's sports (mean 4.01) compared with elite sports (mean 3.44,  $p < 0.01$ ) and community events (mean 3.31,  $p < 0.01$ ). This was also the case for the level of concern about sponsorships by gambling companies (children's sport mean 4.11; elite sport mean 3.78,  $p < 0.01$ ; community events mean 3.77,  $p < 0.01$ ).

#### **Conclusion**

The results support previous work indicating that many Western Australians have reservations about the promotion of unhealthy products at community and sporting events (Ferguson and Rosenberg 2011; Pettigrew et al. 2012). These concerns appear most pronounced

where children are likely to be present in large numbers, such as at children's sporting events.

In line with concerns expressed by social commentators about the rapid saturation of gambling promotion during sporting events (Kruger 2013), and the likelihood that this form of promotion is intentionally targeting children (Grills 212), the respondents in the present study were particularly averse to gambling companies promoting their products by sponsoring community and sporting events. There was a clear hierarchy of concern relating to sponsorship of children's sport, with gambling companies considered least appropriate, followed by alcohol companies, and then unhealthy food/drink companies. For community events and elite sports, gambling retained its position as least preferred, but alcohol and unhealthy food/drink were generally comparable.

Of note is the almost complete lack of significant differences in attitudes towards unhealthy sponsors and restrictions on their activities by respondent gender and parental status. There were some differences by age, with older people typically being more concerned about sponsorship and being more supportive of restrictions than younger respondents.

Some of the results from this study can be compared to those obtained from Healthway's Community Survey conducted in 2010 (Ferguson and Rosenberg 2011). In the Community Survey, 48% of respondents felt that it is inappropriate for unhealthy food companies to sponsor community events. This is comparable to the 45% expressing concern about unhealthy food/drink companies sponsoring community events in the present study. Similarly, 50% of respondents to the Community Survey reported that it is inappropriate for these companies to

sponsor sporting events, while 53% of respondents in the present study were concerned about unhealthy food/drink companies sponsoring elite sports.

A common argument against placing restrictions on the kinds of companies that can sponsor sporting teams/events is that this would disadvantage the sporting industry and make it financially unviable (Kelly et al. 2011b). Some respondents recognised this possibility, but most of the perceived outcomes of restrictive policies were positive and the benefits to children of such restrictions were more salient than any potential negative consequences.

Overall, these results suggest high levels of community concern about the sponsorship of community and sporting events by companies promoting unhealthy products. Gambling-related sponsorships are of particular concern, especially where children are likely to be present in large numbers. The levels of support for restrictive policies indicate that future efforts to regulate such sponsorships would generate low levels of resistance among the general community.

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Suggested citation:  
Pettigrew S, Ferguson R & Rosenberg M. *Advocacy Monitor 2012-2013*. Health Promotion Evaluation Unit, School of Sport Science, Exercise and Health, The University of Western Australia, Perth, 2013.



The Health Promotion Evaluation Unit is an independent academic unit supported by the Western Australian Health Promotion Foundation (Healthway)