

30 May 2008

**The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs Committee
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600**

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Dear Secretary,

Re: Inquiry into Ready-to-Drink Alcohol Beverages

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the **Inquiry into Ready-to-Drink Alcohol Beverages**

We have made a contribution to the submission by the Public Health Association of Australia, and concur with the detailed comments within that submission.

Rather than repeating all that commentary, we would like to focus on specific points particularly in the context that the current 'binge drinking' problem is a consequence of an inter-related combination of factors. Similarly, the remedy to the problem will require a concerted effort by Governments at Federal and State level in collaboration with the appropriate health and alcohol / drug agencies. It is clear from evidence, including extensive reviews of the international literature, that a combination of policy, economic, educational and environmental measures need to be implemented simultaneously for significant benefit to occur.

Strict controls on the manufacture, promotion, pricing and sales of *ready-to-drink alcohol beverages (alcopops)* are likely to be one of the important measures as part of a comprehensive approach to control the binge-drinking problem.

Background

Lack of adequate Government policies have contributed to the hazardous and harmful use of alcohol by Australian youth in recent years. These include: liberalisation of alcohol laws in many States that has increased availability (longer opening hours, more outlets where alcohol is available); cheap alcohol via supermarket related outlets and via happy hour promotions; ***a failure to control the manufacture and marketing of ready-to-drink alcohol beverages (alcopops and their ready availability)***; a failure to control alcohol marketing in general and support of an ineffective Alcoholic Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC).**

Indeed, recent reports from New Zealand state the same reasons for a substantial increase in binge-drinking by youth in that country.

Our rationale for focussing on binge drinking by youth who are the major consumers of alcopops, is based on the following data:

- *In Australia, alcohol is the most commonly used licit and illicit substance among young people.¹ According to the 2005 Australian School Students' Alcohol and Drug (ASSAD) survey data, 86% of 14 year olds had tried alcohol, and 70% of 17 year olds had consumed alcohol in the month prior to the survey.*
- *The Australian Alcohol Guidelines² recommend against adults and adolescents drinking seven or more drinks in one day for males and five or more drinks in one day for females. In Australia, among current drinkers, 30% of 15 year olds and 44% of 17 year olds had consumed alcohol at these levels in the previous week.³ Studies conducted between 2000 and 2004 also found that more than 40% of 15-17 year olds had consumed alcohol at these unsafe levels on their last drinking occasion.⁴*
- *In Australia, 90% of 18-24 year olds drink at levels that place them at high risk of acute harm, such as assault, sexual exploitation and accidental injuries.⁵ Data from longitudinal studies suggest that adolescents who drink excessive amounts of alcohol are at increased risk of becoming heavy users of alcohol in adulthood.⁶*

Secondly there is a growing body of evidence that links the advertising and promotion of alcoholic beverages especially *ready-to-drink alcohol beverages*, and hazardous and harmful use of alcohol.⁷⁻¹¹ This is of particular relevance to the youth market (both underage as well as young adults):

- *The vigorous promotion of ready-to-drink alcohol beverages (eg Coke and Bourbon) is apparently aimed at young drinkers. The annual reports of some alcohol manufacturers (eg Fosters) illustrate the rapid growth of sales of such drinks in recent years, and an indication by the industry that continued growth in this area is likely.*
- *The current system relying on the Voluntary Advertising Code (Alcoholic Beverages Advertising Code) does not provide for adequate control over the type or level of promotions of such beverages^{7,9,11}*

We believe that a more rigorous control process over the advertising and promotion of such alcoholic beverages in Australia is required urgently.

In conclusion we agree that a comprehensive approach that includes dealing with the issues raised at the beginning of our submission**, above, including ***control over the manufacture, pricing, marketing and ready availability of ready-to-drink alcohol beverages***; is required for a significant reduction in hazardous and harmful use of alcohol by youth to occur.^{12,13}

Yours Sincerely

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