

MEDIA RELEASE

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Government's preventative strategy leaves health experts wanting

The Alcohol Policy Coalition welcomes the Government's response to the preventative health taskforce report in last night's budget as a first step in the right direction to fix Australia's \$15.3billion dollar alcohol misuse problem but said it is wanting in critical areas, such as alcohol advertising and taxation reform.

Key wins:

- The Government has honoured their commitment to provide an alternative revenue funding scheme for community sports clubs currently reliant on sponsorship from alcohol companies – though more money will be needed.
- \$20 million for social marketing campaigns aimed at the costs and consequences of binge drinking
- \$14.4million to assist community and sporting organisations to confront the culture of binge drinking
- \$19.1million for early intervention programs to assist young people who are binge drinking

Key gaps:

- The Government has failed to address the impact of alcohol advertising by continuing to trust the liquor industry to voluntarily protect young Australians from alcohol advertising.
- Alcohol taxation will not be reformed at this stage, despite recommendations from the recent Henry Review that alcoholic drinks should be taxed on the basis of their alcohol content to address the current "incoherent" system for taxing beer, wine and spirits.
- The Government has recognised a need for national alcohol sales data but has said little about how or when that information will be collected.

Alcohol advertising:

The Coalition notes that the Government has accepted the need to protect children from the undue influence of advertising – yet have failed to implement the recommendations that would offer such regulation.

"It's time for the Federal Government to fix this problem by establishing an independent alcohol advertising regulator with strong enforcement powers. The alcohol industry continually breaches its own Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC) and has lost the community's trust in deciding what is fit for young people to watch," said John Rogerson CEO Australian Drug Foundation.

Alcohol companies spend millions every year to particularly target young Australians and increase their consumption. There is ample research to show that alcohol marketing directly influences young people's decisions about drinking.

"The alcohol industry cannot be trusted to regulate itself – there is no incentive for alcohol companies to cease targeting young people – rather, it's in the industry's interest to latch on to new and impressionable drinkers at the earliest opportunity. The Government can fix this by implementing an independent industry regulator and removing the loophole in advertising regulations that lets alcohol companies advertise during live daytime sports broadcasts," said Todd Harper, CEO of VicHealth.

Sales data:

The Coalition urges the Government to fast track the collection of wholesale alcohol sales data, which is essential for developing evidence-based alcohol policy.

The Government has taken a step in the right direction by highlighting the need for transparency from the alcohol industry through national alcohol sales data collection. This would enable a means to highlight future potential problems and a measuring stick for evaluation.



“National sales data is the missing piece to the puzzle in working out a solution to Australia’s problems with alcohol. It will tell policy-makers exactly how much alcohol Australians are drinking and enable them to evaluate and develop more effective prevention strategies,” said Craig Sinclair, Director Cancer Prevention, Cancer Council Victoria.

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The Alcohol Policy Coalition (the Coalition) is a collaboration of health agencies – Australian Drug Foundation, Cancer Council Victoria, Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre and VicHealth – with shared concern relating to the misuse of alcohol and its health/social impacts on the community.

Alcohol remains one of the major causes of preventable death and illness in Australia. As such, the Coalition advocates for evidence based policy to prevent and reduce the harms caused by alcohol to Australians. For more information visit [.alcoholpolicycoalition.org](http://alcoholpolicycoalition.org).