Alcohol advertising in rural Australia

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Introduction

As an iconic community organisation, the Country Women’s Association of Australia (CWAA) has enjoyed a respected role in Australian society. We aim to advance the rights and equity of women, families and communities through advocacy and empowerment especially for those living in rural regional and remote Australia. We are recognised as a knowledgeable and responsible Rural Regional and Remote (RRR) community partner. Our work over 90 years across RRR communities has engendered first-hand experience of the complex role that alcohol plays in our society.

Women’s health is particularly important as it is a determinant of the health and wellbeing of their children and their communities. There are major inequalities in the health outcomes of women living in RRR areas, Torres Strait Islander women, immigrant and refugee women, women from disadvantaged backgrounds and women with a disability. In addition, many studies show that rural women have poorer health and worse access to health services than those in the cities and are more likely to die from chronic illness. Less access to healthcare professionals and alcohol treatment services is of particular concern to the CWAA.

Our rural communities enjoy an alcoholic drink, generally for enjoyment, relaxation and sociability. Most people consume alcohol at levels that cause few adverse effects. However, a substantial proportion of people in rural Australia drink at levels that increase their risk of alcohol-related harm. Research data published from a range of government and non-government agencies demonstrates that excessive alcohol consumption can cause detrimental health, family and community hardship. Harm caused by alcohol includes street violence, domestic violence, FASD and chronic disease.

CWAA is committed to ongoing national reflection on the challenges many rural communities face in regard to alcohol abuse, and the effect of alcohol advertising in RRR areas. Through our partnership with National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA) and Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE), we acknowledge that some excellent programs have been conducted in the space of working with rural remote communities in reducing harms related to alcohol and other drugs. Our position is that the more effective and rigorous evaluation and management of alcohol advertising would reduce the disproportionately higher burden of death, disease and injury in RRR communities compared with the general population.

This paper examines the role of alcohol advertising in rural communities. By exploring the experiences of our CWAA members and their families, and with input from a number of our partner organisations, we aim to strengthen RRR communities by providing access to information and national advocacy on the current alcohol advertising standards, the role of alcohol advertising and its particular effect on women and children.

The facts

**Australians are consuming alcohol that places them at risk of harm**
- Alcohol consumption was consistently higher in remote and very remote areas and the proportion of those drinking at risky levels increased with increasing remoteness.¹
• There was also no significant change in the proportion of people in Outer regional and Remote and very remote areas drinking at risky levels for both lifetime and single occasion harm, despite significant declines for people in Major cities and Inner regional areas.2

Australians are concerned about alcohol and its impact on children and families
• An overwhelming majority of Australians (78%) think that we have a problem with alcohol.3
• An equal amount (78%), believe that more needs to be done to address the harm from alcohol.4
• A large proportion of Australians are concerned about alcohol-related violence (79%), child abuse and neglect (64%) and harm to unborn babies in utero (50%).5
• A majority of Australians (59%) believe that governments are not doing enough to address alcohol harms.6

Australians want change to prevent the harm from alcohol
• A vast majority of Australians (70%) support placing a ban on alcohol advertising on television before 8.30pm.7
• A majority (60%) of Australians support not allowing alcohol sponsorship at sporting events.8
• A majority of Australians (51%) support increasing the tax on alcohol products to pay for health, education and treatment of alcohol-related problems.9

Advertising supports the drinking culture in rural Australia
About one-third of the Australian population live in RRR areas. In those areas, federal government statistics indicate that alcohol consumption and its associated harms are consistently higher than in urban areas. The 2010 National Drug Strategy Household Survey shows that the proportion of those drinking at risky levels increases with increasing remoteness.

FARE presented a detailed report to the National Board of the CWAA in February of 2017 that demonstrated that more young people are abstaining from alcohol than ever before, and that this pattern is happening around the world. 20% of our population drink 90% of the alcohol consumed in Australia, and 4 million Australians drink twice the standard of 2 drinks per day.

Indigenous Australians were more likely than non-Indigenous Australians to report risky drinking on single occasions. Indigenous Australians are also 1.4 times more likely to abstain from drinking alcohol, however, 7.5% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are more likely to die from alcohol harm and whilst there are more abstainers, those that drink do so heavily. A number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have established “dry” areas to control the sale and supply of alcohol and restrict hours of sale and amounts of alcohol in order to reduce harmful drinking practices.

FARE has advised that each day alcohol consumption is responsible for 435 hospitalisations and 15 deaths and costs the Australian community up to $36 billion per year. Alcohol consumption is involved in up to 65% of family violence reported to police and 36% of intimate partner homicides. Over 1 million children are affected by other people’s drinking with 14,000 children in child protection. Alarmingly, the abuse of alcohol is not adequately addressed in family violence plans.

Findings from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) on trends in alcohol availability10, use and treatment show that 18 to 24 year olds are most likely to report risky drinking behaviour.
Further to this, statistics demonstrate that alcohol consumption among adolescent Australians is frequent and excessive, with about 31% of males and 14% of females aged 15 to 17 years exceeding the adult guidelines for single occasion risk.

The AIHW has reported that among those living in rural areas, men and youths are particularly likely to drink at high-risk levels. Those working in the farming industry are also more likely to drink at risky levels. Among farming communities in rural Victoria, an estimated 54% of men and 22% of women reported drinking at high risk levels at least once a month compared to 20% for the general population.

A recent study undertaken by La Trobe University’s Centre for Alcohol Policy Research (La Trobe), has suggested that limited cultural activities in rural areas lead people to drink as a way to socialise. The study interviewed 20 rural and regional Victorians aged between 36 and 70 on their attitudes to, and experiences of, drinking, as part of research into drinking cultures. The study was undertaken to inform projects funded through VicHealth’s Alcohol Culture Change Initiative, which aims to reduce risky drinking among those aged 36 to 70.

The La Trobe study found that rural and regional Victorians in this age group are more likely to drink at risky levels than their counterparts in Melbourne. Drinking at the local pub was presented as one of the few options for socialising. Behaviours such as ‘round-buying’ or ‘shouting’ tended to encourage drinking.

The country town or community where drinking is heaviest is the one with more pubs and clubs. It is important to note that those areas with a strong policing presence have reduced alcohol related incidents.

Professor Anthony Shakeshaft, Deputy Director National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre on the ABC radio program “Bush Telegraph” in 2014, stated that ‘People go out on the weekend and head to the pubs and clubs. We didn’t find that a greater number of “drive in” bottle shops was a factor and ‘It’s about availability—the predominate pattern in Australia is binge drinking—people getting on it over the weekend,’ he said.

For many of our rural communities, there is a limited range of venues for recreation or socialising. Pubs or sports clubs are often the only options. Social interaction and maintaining family relationships in the social isolation that can be imposed in living in RRR Australia often leads to drinking behaviours. Drinking and sporting events, such as football and local horse and dog racing carnivals, are often inextricably linked.

The NRHA fact sheet—Alcohol Use in Rural Australia reports that studies show a lack of knowledge of alcohol guidelines and alcohol-related harms among rural residents, and a low level of community awareness of alcohol as a local problem. They also reveal a low awareness of existing alcohol interventions in the community.

A clear influence on alcohol consumption includes elements of social interaction including social media and the exposure to alcohol advertising and marketing. Alcohol advertising during televised sporting events is particularly concerning for families with children.
Marketing and promotion of alcohol in rural areas

Mateship and friendship are common themes in alcohol promotion. These values are held dear in the bush. Alcohol promotion in rural areas often displays images of rural life, whilst enjoying a drink. Alcohol is frequently integrated into rural biased promotions as an essential part of relaxing after a hard day at work. The promotion of drinking as the Australian way of enjoying recreational pursuits buys in to our national rural identity.

Liquor retailers focused on bulk purchases has an impact on problem behaviours. Point of sale promotions are very popular in rural communities. The opportunity to win a prize or purchase alcohol at a reduced price is very attractive to individuals who may be experiencing economic hardship.

The consumption of pre-mixed sweet alcohol drinks is inexpensive and attractive to young people, and targeted advertising campaigns have had an impact on consumption.

A random view of rural Social media sites frequently displays images of drinking as part of everyday life. Depictions of Celebrations and commiserations are often accompanied by copious amounts of alcohol placement.

FASD

The increased consumption of alcohol by women, particularly through the practice of binge drinking has led us to partner with FARE (Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education) to raise awareness of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). FASD is a term used for a spectrum of conditions caused by foetal alcohol exposure. Each condition and its diagnosis is based on the presentation of characteristic features which are unique to the individual and may be physical, developmental and/or neurobehavioral. The frustration is that this is a totally preventable condition.

Despite many contrary reports and published research over the last 20 years, we are acutely aware that alcohol can cause damage to the unborn child at any time during pregnancy. The level of harm is predicated on the amount and frequency of alcohol use which may be moderated by factors such as the age and health of the mother, intergenerational alcohol use and environmental factors such as exposure to violence.

FASD is often referred to as an invisible disability in RRR Australia, as it can often go undetected. The lack of understanding of FASD has led to Health professionals overlooking, ignoring or attributing FASD to another non-genetic condition. The view that the presenting condition is a result of “bad parenting” can be particularly distressing for parents or carers of affected children.

FARE has reported that 1:4 women continue to drink whilst pregnant. In 2013, the government announced the Commonwealth Action Plan to reduce the impact of FASD. A total of 9.2 million dollars has been allocated. This program ends in 2017.

It is important to note that pregnancy warning labels on alcohol products are self-regulated by the alcohol industry. It is the position of the CWAA, that the current pregnancy consumption warning labelling on alcohol products is manifestly inadequate.

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) has published recommendations for drinking alcohol to avoid health risks, for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. It is
recommended that for women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, or who are breastfeeding, not drinking is the safest option.

The CWAA position is that the safest option for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding is to not drink alcohol at all.

**Alcohol advertising in sport**

Sport is an important social event in rural communities. Live action events are only surpassed by big screen broadcasts in pubs and clubs. At home, families around Australia view Alcohol advertising in broadcast sport.

Alcohol consumption has become very closely associated with sport and advertising during sports events. Football players, cricketers and other Athletes don uniforms with alcohol advertising sponsorship positioned prominently, and speak during live interviews about “having a drink to celebrate” a win. This sends an alarming message to children who watch sport as an important part of their connection with broader Australia. Clear evidence is provided through a number of research entities that exposure to alcohol advertising influences young people’s beliefs and attitudes about drinking. Adolescents exposed to drinking culture as children will start to use alcohol earlier, frequently leading to at-risk behaviours. Pleasingly, some sporting heroes are now speaking out against alcohol in sport.

Alcohol advertising is not permitted before 8.30pm, except on weekends, ostensibly to protect children. Alarmingly, an exception is made for sport. Last year, Monash University published its Drug and Alcohol Review. It reported there were 3,544 alcohol ads on free-to-air broadcasts of live AFL, NRL and cricket matches, representing 60% of all TV alcohol advertising in sport for the year. AFL had the most alcohol ads (1,942) followed by cricket (941) and NRL (661). The study found that “children’s exposure to alcohol advertising is greatest when watching AFL”.

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians says: “It has been estimated that children aged under 18 years are exposed to a cumulative total of more than 50 million alcohol advertisements each year.”

A FARE survey found that more than half of all Australians favour bans on advertising during live sport, and 70% want a ban until 8.30pm.

Tobacco companies once used sport to promote their products. Community standards eventually brought an end to this practice. Children exposed to 50 million alcohol advertisements each year, alcohol fuelled family violence and the enormous costs to our healthcare system as a result of alcohol consumption should drive regulatory reform.

**Current regulatory arrangements—‘The Code’**

Standards for alcohol marketing in Australia are set out in the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC) Scheme titled ‘ABAC Responsible Alcohol Marketing Code’. ABAC is responsible for the regulation of alcohol advertising, be it print, internet, television, cinema, radio, producer point of sale and other marketing. Advertising guidelines have been negotiated with government and all complaints are handled by the ABAC. It is significant to note that the ABAC is jointly funded by the Brewers Association of Australia and New Zealand, the Distilled Spirits Industry Council of Australia and the Winemakers Federation of Australia.
Direct signatories and users of the AAPS pre-vetting service also contribute to the funding of the scheme. The Scheme is governed by a Management Committee comprised of representatives from the Brewers Association of Australia and New Zealand, Winemakers Federation of Australia, Distilled Spirits Industry Council of Australia, The Communications Council, and a government representative.

Health groups in Australia created a new organisation in response to clear issues emerging in an industry that self regulates. The Alcohol Advertising Review Board (AARB) is independent and operates free of industry influence.

The Australian government has demonstrated clear reluctance to strengthen controls on the promotion of alcohol.

Protect children from alcohol advertising and sponsorship

In May 2016, the National Rugby League (NRL) partnered with Carlton & United Breweries and The Daily Telegraph to give away free cans of New South Wales Blues-branded Victorian Bitter (VB) beer with each newspaper sold (see Figure 1, below). If alcohol sponsorship had not already pushed the bar too far, now fans could sip from cans of alcohol that were dressed like their sporting heroes.

Figure 1 VB NSW Blues promotion in The Daily Telegraph

A variety of studies have demonstrated strong associations between exposure to alcohol advertising and alcohol consumption behaviours. A review of 12 longitudinal studies of more than 38,000 young people has shown that the volume of advertising they are exposed to influences both the age at which young people start drinking and levels of consumption.\textsuperscript{20} International studies have shown that each additional alcohol advertisement viewed by 15 to 26-year-olds increased the number of alcoholic drinks consumed by one per cent.\textsuperscript{21} In addition, a United States study demonstrated that each additional hour of television school children are exposed to increase the probability that they would commence drinking in the subsequent 18 months by nine per cent.\textsuperscript{22} Another study in New Zealand found that males who reported being aware of more alcohol advertisements at age 15 drank significantly more beer at age 18.\textsuperscript{23}

An Australian cross-sectional survey of 1,113 Australian adolescents (aged 12 to 17 years) explored the relationships between multiple drinking behaviours (initiation, recent consumption, and regular consumption) and various types of advertising (television, magazine, newspaper, internet, billboard, in-store, bar and promotional material). Alcohol advertising across a range of media was found to
strongly influence the drinking patterns of young people, with the impact most pronounced on initiation into drinking. A cross-sectional survey of 6,651 school students across four countries found that exposure to online alcohol marketing and exposure to alcohol-branded sports sponsorship both increased young adolescents’ intention to drink and increased the odds that they had been drinking in the past 30 days.

The volume of alcohol marketing that young Australians are exposed to is unprecedented. Young people are exposed to alcohol marketing through traditional media such as television, radio, newspapers, magazines and billboards, and through the internet, including social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

Alcohol marketing also occurs in the form of sponsorship of cultural and sporting events. Alcohol advertising features prominently in sporting events and culture in Australia. Alcohol brands are in regular view of the public, both on the ground and on television, through naming rights (of events, sporting fields and teams) and branding (on fences, the pitch and other signage at the sports ground and on uniforms and promotional merchandise). The alcohol industry has a close relationship with sporting institutions like Cricket Australia, the Australian Football League (AFL) and National Rugby League (NRL) promoting a view that alcohol and sport are intrinsically linked.

Studies show that alcohol sponsorship in sport is not only associated with hazardous drinking by sporting participants, it also communicates strong messages about alcohol brands and drinking that are absorbed by children. An estimated cumulative audience of 26.9 million Australian children and adolescents watching Australia’s major televised sporting codes, AFL Cricket and NRL, are exposed to 51 million instances of alcohol advertising, with nearly half (47 per cent) of these broadcast during daytime programming between 6am and 8.30pm. During the Bathurst 1000 in 2008, those who watched the whole race (from 10.35am until 5.05pm) were exposed to 35 minutes of alcohol advertising including in-break alcohol advertisements and sponsorship. This audience included an estimated 117,000 children and young people aged 5-17 years. An Australian study of 164 children aged between five and 12 found that 76 per cent of them could correctly match at least one sport with its relevant sponsor. A survey of 155 young people (aged 9-15 years) in Western Australia found that 75 per cent recognised Bundaberg Rum’s Bundy Bear and correctly associated him with an alcoholic product.

This type of alcohol marketing is visible by children and young people as sporting and cultural events are often held or televised during times when they are likely to be watching or in attendance. To allow time for adaptation, an Alcohol Sponsorship Replacement Fund may facilitate phasing out of alcohol sponsorship in sport. Given the current levels of alcohol sponsorship, a relatively modest investment of $100 million over 4 years would allow sufficient time for sporting codes to adjust. Alternative sponsors will be readily available. In NRL, for example, the value of the most recent contract with Telstra ($6.5 million) was more than four times greater than that of the largest alcohol sponsor (Carlton United Brewery, $1.5 million).

There is strong and increasing support for regulating alcohol advertisements to reduce their impact on children. In 2016, 60 per cent of the Australian community supports a ban on alcohol sponsorship at sporting events. Sport has successfully transitioned away from reliance on tobacco advertising. It is now time to address its growing reliance on alcohol.
Join forces to make a difference

Two examples of programs that communities can join to make a difference and to protect our young people from the harm of alcohol are:

**Good Sports Program + Local Drug Action Teams**
Run by Australian Drug Foundation (ADF) the Good Sports program operates in 700 clubs across Australia. Their Local Drug Action Teams (LDATs) is a new program funded by the Federal Government as part of the response to ice campaign to establish 220 LDATs across Australia and with particular focus on RRR. LDATs are based on local communities coming together to develop partnerships and build local capacity to reduce the harm caused by drug use, all laid out in Local Community Action Plans. Local communities can engage in this program with step 1 commencing on 1 June 2017 for groups to become LDATS before the funding opens in August 2017. Details are on the ADF website [www.adf.org.au](http://www.adf.org.au)

**Booze Free Sport**
Booze Free Sport is a Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) campaign calling for unhealthy alcohol sponsors to be phased out from professional sports.

It's becoming impossible to know where the game ends and the alcohol marketing begins. Millions of Australian children and families watch sports like the AFL, NRL, and cricket, which are saturated with alcohol promotion. Yet all the evidence shows that exposure to alcohol advertising is associated with young people drinking more and from an earlier age. That's why CWAA with FARE are calling for an end to alcohol sponsorship in sport.

We know Australians care deeply about this issue and are ready to see change so let's protect our kids by removing alcohol sponsors from Australia's favourite games.

Details of the program can be found on the FARE website [http://fare.org.au/boozefreesport/](http://fare.org.au/boozefreesport/)

**Summary**
Alcohol advertising in rural Australia reflects the issues and concerns of the broader Australian community. The depiction of celebratory events as being naturally coupled with alcohol consumption is clearly problematic as there is a considerable body of research dedicated to the negative outcomes of problem alcohol consumption.

The clear connection between alcohol consumption in RRR Australia and FASD, family violence, road trauma, farming accidents and family disintegration and health outcomes requires stronger regulation of alcohol advertising and promotion. The current system of alcohol regulation, administered by the alcohol industry, has failed to ensure that our young people, in particular, are not exposed to alcohol advertising.

Together, we can work toward improving the controls and exposure of alcohol advertising for better health outcomes for all who live in RRR communities in Australia.
Recommendations

The CWAA makes several recommendations intended to achieve greater protection of families and children from alcohol promotion and marketing in our RRR communities.

1. Instigate and Australian Government-led review of alcohol advertising regulation across all forms of media which includes:
   - no alcohol advertising between 6:00am and 8:30pm with no exceptions
   - mandatory-regulation rather than self-regulation.
2. Phase out alcohol sponsorship of sporting and cultural events and establish an alcohol sponsorship replacement fund to aid the transition.
3. Increase tax on alcohol products to pay for health, education and treatment of alcohol-related problems.
4. Recommend the inclusion of alcohol and its effect in family violence plans.
5. Review of the outcomes of the Commonwealth Action Plan to reduce the impact of FASD with the program due to end in 2017 and make recommendations for continued support.
6. Implement mandatory health warning labels which are clear and standardised on all alcohol products available for sale in Australia including pregnancy warning labels.
7. Introduce point-of-sale warning signs at all venues that sell alcohol to protect the health of pregnant women and the babies they carry with the inclusion of information on how to find out more on the risks of FASD.
8. Review the results of trading-hour laws and the reduction on harm caused by alcohol and strengthen trading-hours legislation.
9. Support future research aimed at the development of evidence-based community-led alcohol programs in RRR Australia.

References

4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.


13. ABC Bush Telegraph Friday 7 Feb 2014 12.23pm

14. NRHA – reference ALCOHOL USE IN RURAL AUSTRALIA Fact Sheet March 2014

15. National Health and Medical Research Council; Alcohol Guidelines: Reducing the health risk. July 2016


17. Calling last drinks on promoting alcohol to children via sport Media Release 3 March 2016


35. Good Sports Program and Local Drug Action Teams Program details on the website for the Australian Drug Foundation www.adf.org.au


**Presenter**

Ms Dorothy Coombe is the current President of the Country Women’s Association of Australia. Dorothy also represents the CWAA on the Council of the National Rural Health Alliance. Dorothy has been a member of the following two Ministerial Review Committees: The Privacy Regulations and Industry Standards in the Direct Marketing and Telemarketing Industry Sectors; and Deregulation of the Direct Marketing Industry. She is Chair of Foodbank Victoria and holds several other Board positions, including Foodbank Australia, The Australian Communications and Media Authority, National Rural Women’s Coalition, FarmSafe Australia, National Rural Law and Justice Alliance, Associated Country Women of the World, and the Regional Rural Remote Communications Coalition. She has also been on the boards of Australian Direct Marketing Association and the Australian Telemarketing Association. Dorothy is married to Max Oates and they have two sons and two grandsons. Her interests are family, friends, sport (love it all, Go Bombers!) and horse racing and breeding and she loves a good biographical book.