

MEDIA RELEASE: PHAA & ADCA



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DRINKS INDUSTRY GROUP SHOULD STOP USING YOUNG PEOPLE

Leading health organisations have criticised the alcohol industry's DrinkWise organisation for involving young people in what appears to be largely a promotional exercise. Additionally, DrinkWise's claims to be 'independent' have been criticised, along with the organisation's perceived selective quotation of findings from research reports.

DrinkWise is funded by the alcohol industry, and according to its website half its Board members are senior alcohol industry executives. A 'National Youth Forum', organised by DrinkWise for Canberra on April 1, is claimed to be about 'finding a middle ground for Australia's youth drinking culture'.

Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) alcohol spokesperson and Alcohol Special Interest Group convenor Professor Mike Daube has called for DrinkWise to cancel their plans to involve young people in the event. "It is shocking that an organisation funded by the alcohol industry is involving young people in this sort of public exercise," he added.

Professor Daube said that materials circulated ahead of the Forum show an agenda that asks soft questions and fails to address fundamental issues such as tax, alcohol advertising and sponsorship, drinks designed to appeal to younger drinkers, or controls on access, where action would make a real difference. Promotion for the Forum claims that it aims to 'reflect on the culture, behaviours and alcohol consumption patterns of young adults' – but he concluded that, "it looks a lot like using adolescents to promote an organisation established by alcohol companies who surely have a vested interest in developing this market."

David Templeman, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia (ADCA) said, "Even the phrasing around the Youth Forum is disturbing. The aim is presented as 'finding a middle ground for Australia's youth drinking culture'. But there is no middle ground where health recommendations on drinking by children and young people are concerned. 80% of alcohol consumed by young people is consumed in ways that put their (and others') health at risk. More than half our kids think that drinking to get drunk is acceptable. The National Health and Medical Research Council recommend that, 'for children and young people under 18 years of age, not drinking is the safest option'," said Mr Templeman.

"A middle ground for Australia's youth drinking culture may suit the alcohol industry; but it certainly does not suit the health and well-being of our young people.

"DrinkWise claims to be concerned about drinking problems in young people. But when does this organisation call for serious and effective action that might upset its alcohol industry funders?" asked Mr Templeman.

Professor Daube is also critical of the way DrinkWise uses research, citing a recent literature review commissioned by the group on the influence of parents and siblings for which the media statement ('Kids

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and Alcohol Don't Mix') focused on parental influence without making any mention of regulation. This was despite the fact that the researchers stressed from the outset that, *'There is substantial evidence that regulatory influences including price, access and marketing are key drivers of alcohol consumption by young people'*. The report also concluded that to expect changed behaviour without addressing underlying issues such as regulation *'has been condemned as simplistic and ineffective'*, and confirmed that regulatory interventions work.

"DrinkWise have also stayed remarkably silent about research they funded that is forthright about issues such as alcohol industry marketing to young people, and the key measures needed to curb drinking by young people, such as tax, curbs on marketing, and liquor licensing controls," said Professor Daube.

"They seem to me to live in a spin-driven world, selectively quoting from research, reporting on favourable extracts and hoping nobody will notice the important conclusions they have ignored," he said.

Mr Templeman added, "We know what needs to be done. There is clear evidence on the need for a comprehensive strategy that goes far beyond public relations activities, and also addresses key factors such as access, price and alcohol promotion.

"We call on DrinkWise to cancel the event and instead, to press their alcohol industry funders to support measures that will have an impact," said Mr Templeman.

For further information/comment:

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