

Legislated controls needed for alcohol and junk food marketing

The present system of voluntary controls on alcohol and junk food marketing has failed and should be replaced with legislation, according to the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA).

PHAA President Professor Mike Daube said,

“Well over half a billion dollars a year is being spent promoting alcohol and junk food without any effective controls. The current advertising codes are voluntary, self regulated and full of holes. They completely ignore forms of marketing like sports sponsorship through which children are exposed to alcohol and junk food promotion for hours on end. A recent analysis showed that during junk food and alcohol-sponsored events the sponsor’s logo was visible on-screen for up to 75% of playing time. This is brilliant marketing, with kids’ sporting idols turned into mobile billboards for best-selling brands. Small wonder that we have an obesity epidemic and rising public concerns about drinking by young people.”

“At a conservative estimate, alcohol and junk food companies spend well over \$500 million on all forms of promotion – the true figure may well be as high as a billion dollars. The explosion in sports sponsorship by these companies in recent years means that children are being exposed to a barrage of advertising for unhealthy products. This is all the more disturbing at a time when the obesity epidemic is predicted to shorten the life spans of our children for the first time ever.”

It is time for legislation to replace voluntary codes that are hopelessly ineffective. The PHAA supports calls in today’s Medical Journal of Australia for tough action on obesity and a levy on alcohol and junk food advertising to promote healthier products. “This worked brilliantly in the US some years ago for tobacco under the Fairness Doctrine – so much so that tobacco companies stopped their own TV advertising” said Professor Daube. We know that there is a problem and that there is public concern. What reason can there be for failing to act, beyond pressure from these large and powerful industries?”

“We have a crisis on our hands with both obesity and young people’s drinking patterns. Advertising plays a vital role in encouraging and normalising the behaviours we are trying to prevent. The alcohol and food industries will never agree to effective controls on their irresponsible promotions. We urge all parties to make a commitment to legislation that will curb the ruthless way young people are being exposed to promotion of alcohol and junk food”.

ENDS

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