Pregnancy warnings on alcohol labels: health experts see red

The lives of thousands of unborn children in Australia are being put at risk by the alcohol industry’s latest attempts to water down new health label warnings on alcohol products.

Tomorrow on Friday 17 July Australia’s Food Safety Ministers are being urged to end an impasse, dating back many years, and created by an alcohol industry which puts profits before people.

‘Just as we appear to have some agreement that this labelling is important to protect the health and wellbeing of families and communities, the alcohol lobby is still campaigning to reduce the effectiveness of the warning label,’ said PHAA CEO Terry Slevin.

“We remain resolute that this new labelling must contain the colour red. It is the colour that is consistently rated as conveying a warning message to the community, and it will stand out more clearly that alcohol use during pregnancy causes harm.’

Proposed new warning label:

Mr Slevin said the alcohol industry’s argument that using the colour red on labels would be too expensive was both laughable and an insult to the Ministers who are about to make an important decision for the health of future generations of Australians.

‘Make no mistake, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is caused by alcohol, it is preventable, and it affects thousands of new born Australian children every year, Mr Slevin said. ‘Alcohol use during pregnancy can also lead to miscarriage, stillbirth, premature birth, low birth weight and developmental problems. This ruins lives and it costs our community dearly in the additional health care required by sufferers of FASD for many decades.’

PHAA CEO Terry Slevin has also expressed concern that Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) which has researched and proposed the new health warnings, may be softening its stance under ongoing pressure from the powerful alcohol lobby.

‘We are disappointed that FSANZ has amended the signal wording on alcohol labels from ‘Health Warning’ to ‘Pregnancy Warning’ as this will diminish the impact. This is not a warning about pregnancy, it is a warning about the health impact of alcohol on mums to be and their unborn babies.’
‘FSANZ has also given ground by extending the transition period from two to three years, giving the alcohol industry more than enough time to update their labelling.’

Mr Slevin said the PHAA fully endorsed a letter to the Ministers, signed by more than 150 organisations and 1,500 individuals which said in part: ‘Watering down, and in effect camouflaging the label through changes to its colour, size or wording, would be risking the health and wellbeing of thousands of Australians for years to come. As a community we want Aussie kids to have the best start in life. Help our community give them that by supporting this new label without further delay.’

Examples of current ineffective pregnancy warning labels on wine sold in Australia:

For further information/comment:

Karina Martin, PHAA Media Manager 0450 522 762 kmartin@phaa.net.au