

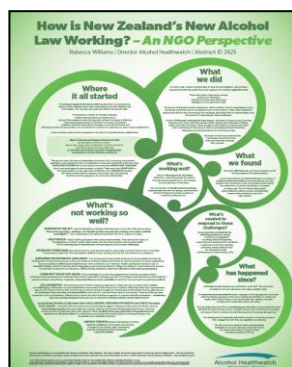
## Global Alcohol Policy Conference (GAPC) 2015

The biennial Global Alcohol Policy Conference was held in Edinburgh, Scotland on 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> October 2015.

The conference was co-hosted by the Global Alcohol Policy Alliance (GAPA) and Alcohol Focus Scotland. The conference was supported by the Scottish Government, co-sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO) and nine other supporting organisations, including Massey University, New Zealand.

The theme of the conference was *“Momentum for change: research and advocacy reducing alcohol harm.”* The conference brought together advocates, researchers, health professionals and policy makers to discuss evidence-based actions to reduce alcohol harm worldwide. Around 400 people from 60 countries attended the conference. There were 4 plenary sessions and 26 concurrent sessions (110 oral presentations).

The Alcohol Healthwatch team made two poster presentations at the conference which were well received.



Alcohol Healthwatch poster presentations

The following is a summary of the highlights and key themes of the conference.

### Day 1: Implementing effective alcohol policies

The conference was dedicated to the late Dr. Evelyn Gillan and began with a moving tribute to her work and her life achievements including in her most current role as Chief Executive of Alcohol Focus Scotland. Evelyn's husband Tom accepted her honorary fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh.

The opening address was given by Scotland's First Minister Ms Nicola Sturgeon - whose government is leading the fight to introduce minimum unit pricing (MUP) in Scotland. The Minister (pictured inset) told delegates that the European Union (EU) Court of Justice Advocate General has determined that MUP is not precluded by EU law, and that it is for the domestic courts to take a final decision. The Advocate General has said that policy can be implemented if it is shown to be the most effective public health policy measure available.

Minister Sturgeon said that despite the industry opposition, her government remains "absolutely committed" to introducing MUP and restricting alcohol advertising to children.



Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon

Extracts from her presentation include:

*“No responsible government can ignore an issue that has such devastating consequences for the population that it serves.”*

*“The first responsibility of any Government is to the health of its population.”*

*“...I believe it is the duty of politicians and Government to lead by example...”*

A short film by Alcohol Focus Scotland, **Alcohol: A Global Concern**, and a presentation from the WHO set the scene for the day.

Prominent researchers Professor Jim McCambridge and Thomas Babor presented an overview of industry strategies and tactics in the UK and Brazil, and the ongoing battle between public health and big alcohol.



*Prof. Jim McCambridge addressing the power balance*

University of Auckland law Professor Jane Kelsey warned that mega trade treaties such as the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA); Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP); and Trade in Services Agreement (TISA) pose a significant threat to alcohol control policies.



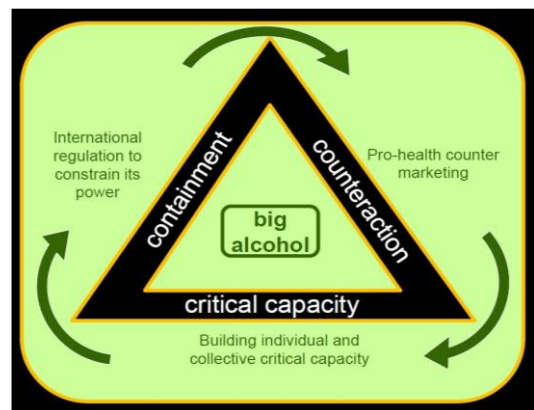
*Prof. Jane Kelsey elaborating on the ‘three-headed hydra’- TPPA, TTIP and TISA*

## **Day 2: Building support for protecting children’s right to grow up free from alcohol marketing.**

University of Liverpool law Professor Amandine Garde questioned whether the problem of pervasive marketing practices towards children could be tackled from a human rights perspective.

Prof. Garde drew attention to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC); in particular Article 24 - Right to Health; Article 17- Right to Information and Article 32 - Freedom from Exploitation, and to the European Convention on Human Rights. Prof. Garde’s message to public health advocates was to strongly consider rights-based approaches to protecting children from alcohol marketing.

World renowned social marketing guru Professor Gerard Hastings spoke of the need for radical action to “overcome” the power imbalance between policy advocates and the alcohol industry. Prof. Hastings talked of three logical public health responses to this: containment; counteraction and critical capacity building. He concluded in a positive note saying that ‘it is obvious’- evidence, right and the people are on our side, so ‘we will overcome’ the power imbalance

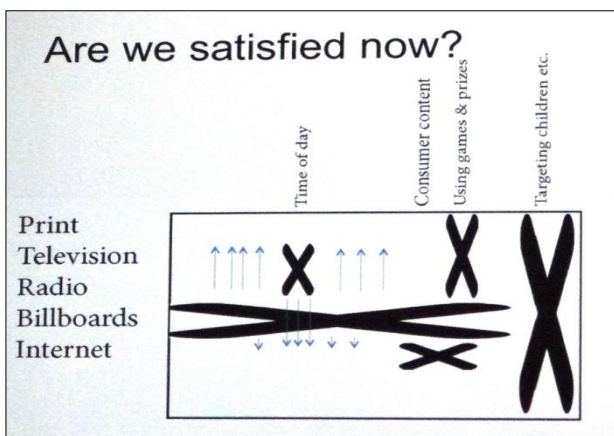


*Prof Hastings presented the above model of public health response for shifting the power*

The experiences of Thailand, South Africa and Finland in curbing alcohol marketing were also shared.

In Finland for example they are attempting to change the default setting from what the presenter described as being “everything is allowed – unless it is specifically forbidden.” Finland are moving towards the French Loi Evin model where the default setting is everything is forbidden unless it is specifically allowed.

Finland has introduced the world’s first restrictions on alcohol marketing in social media (prohibiting gamification, user generated content and peer-to-peer sharing). Restrictions on social media came into force on 1 January 2015.



*Finland's alcohol marketing restrictions*

There were a number of presentations and discussions at the conference reflecting the range of activities on alcohol policy around the world including: regional alliances such as....., country efforts in developing National Alcohol Plans and/or Policies, to grassroots community action and advocacy towards better policies.

A presentation by the World Health Organisation (WHO) reaffirmed the ‘best buys’ in reducing alcohol-related harm, and highlighted the importance of focusing on the prevention of non-communicable disease (NCD).

They also discussed the implementation of the 2010 *Global alcohol strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol*.

Concerns were raised by civil society organisations, that at a national level many

governments were not doing enough to progress the strategy’s actions.

Digital marketing of alcohol and its complexities were presented and discussed in several of the sessions.

New Zealand had a strong presence at the conference with leading alcohol researchers Prof. Sally Casswell and Dr. Taisia Huckle presenting findings from the *International Alcohol Control Study*, and Prof. Jennie Connor presenting on alcohol industry’s smear tactics in New Zealand.

In his presentation Professor David Jernigan discussed the state of evidence on alcohol marketing. Prof. Jernigan shared some of alcohol industry’s clever product marketing and how they are targeting groups vulnerable to alcohol-related harm.



*Prof. David Jernigan, John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health*

### Day 3: Building a Global Network

The conference was rounded off by summaries and priorities from the regional meetings that were held during conference.

Prof. Jernigan then presented the **Conference Declaration** which was unanimously adopted by the delegates.

In summary the Declaration calls on governments and civil society around the world to support and implement WHO’s global strategies on alcohol, and on non-communicable diseases, and to focus on the most effective and cost-effective actions.

These includes the three “best buys” – increasing the price of alcohol, reducing its

physical availability, and restricting its marketing – as well as effective implementation and enforcement of proven strategies for reducing drink-driving.

It recognises the rights of children to grow up safe from alcohol-related harm, and in particular the urgent need to restrict alcohol marketing in all its forms.

The declaration notes with concern the ramifications of global and regional trade agreements for evidence-based public health policies, and calls on Member States to protect their alcohol policies from commercial and vested interests of the alcohol industry.

In closing, founder and chair of the Global Alcohol Policy Alliance (GAPA), Derek Rutherford's contribution to the alcohol policy field was acknowledged.

Derek stepped down as the chair of GAPA and passed the mantle to Prof. Sally Casswell.



*Derek Rutherford receiving the lifetime achievement award from Prof. Sally Casswell.*

In her closing address Prof. Casswell appealed to all delegates to advocate to national governments for stronger alcohol policies. She also emphasised the need for a binding international agreement to support national efforts to reduce alcohol-related harm, and urged WHO member states to advocate for it.

The next **Global Alcohol Policy Conference** will be held in Australia in 2017.



*Michael Thorn, FARE, accepting the flag on behalf of Australia who will host the 2017 GAPC Conference.*

To view the conference declaration, presentations and the short film visit [www.gapc2015.com](http://www.gapc2015.com).

Alcohol Healthwatch wishes to pay tribute to and acknowledge the sad passing of our dear Scottish colleague Dr Evelyn Gillan earlier this year.

We hosted Evelyn in New Zealand in 2010, and she was one of the key note speakers at our *From Harm to Harmony* Symposium.

Evelyn's passionate conviction to addressing alcohol-related harm, and her warm engaging personality will be sadly missed.



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