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News Views

The Newsletter of Alcohol Healthwatch

Alcohol marketing — beyond the glamour, fun and sex

Government regulation is the key, advise local and international experts

The current review of the regulation of alcohol marketing is an exciting opportunity for New Zealand to again lead the world in the regulation of harmful products. New Zealanders should aim high when making their submissions and seek legislation to regulate and monitor alcohol marketing. This was the general consensus of speakers at Alcohol Healthwatch's symposia on alcohol marketing held in Auckland and Wellington recently.

Two visiting experts in alcohol marketing, Dr David Jernigan from Georgetown University in Washington and Associate Professor Sandra Jones from Wollongong University, hoped that New Zealand would not be limited by the experiences of their countries.

"This is an exciting and tremendous opportunity. It is inspiring to us in the US that you can have a national review on this issue." *– Dr David Jernigan*

Professor Sally Casswell from Massey University stressed the importance of the current review for New Zealand, saying that the evidence suggests that the marketing that is going on at present is making a very important contribution to the situation we are facing in New Zealand around alcohol.

The presentations of both international speakers contained graphic examples of where leaving the control of alcohol advertising to industry self-regulation can lead.

"What you don't want to do as a country is say 'we've done a review and alcohol advertising in New Zealand is not as bad as in Australia, so we're doing quite well'," said Jones. " You want to do better than that." Despite a government review in 2003 that threatened the industry with tough regulation if the self-regulation did not dramatically improve, Jones demonstrated how hard it was to get complaints upheld under the Australian system. She showed a series of ads that were definitely a notch beyond any considered acceptable in New Zealand, yet complaints about them were ignored or not upheld. "Any form of self-regulation is always going to have the potential to lead to this outcome," she said.

"***You are in a really good position to 'do it differently' to Australia."*** *– Associate Professor Sandra Jones*

In the US, industry groups have agreed to limit their advertising to places where 30% or less of the audience is under the legal drinking age. Dr Jernigan demonstrated, however, that despite some improvement this standard still allows young people to be more exposed to many types of marketing than adults of legal drinking age.

Advertising is very much creating a culture

With reference to the New Zealand government goal of a change in the drinking culture, Jernigan reflected on the power

(continued overleaf)

Submissions due

There's still time to have your say on what you think of alcohol marketing in New Zealand and how it should be regulated.

Submissions on the *Review of the Regulation of Alcohol Advertising* are due 31 October.

See www.ndp.govt.nz for stakeholder discussion document and submission form and contact Alcohol Healthwatch for any information or assistance.

Right: One of a series of billboards that has appeared in Auckland since the review got under way.

Professor Sally Casswell

of advertising to itself influence and create a culture that is in conflict with this goal. "It is important that we understand alcohol advertising as a tool of social change – of embedding the product in the lifestyle of the user – it's very much creating change in youth culture."

This view was reinforced by Professor Casswell: "Alcohol marketing is about building a relationship with young people, with lots of interactive things happening to build relationships with brands. It's incredibly clever, appealing and tempting."

Casswell said that the evidence we have in front of us is very strong in terms of alcohol advertising contributing to alcohol-related harm. She presented data that indicated that the reach of television alcohol advertising is about the same level for 5-14 year olds as other age groups – 90% of 5-18 year olds are regularly being exposed to alcohol ads on TV. Casswell's research team has found a very high relationship between the brand advertising young people are most exposed to and brand allegiance; for example in 2004 Tui was the brand 10-17 year olds were most exposed to on TV and also had the highest level of brand allegiance in that age group.

Voluntary regulatory systems don't lead to good outcomes

In Casswell's view, these sort of voluntary systems to control alcohol advertising don't seem to work, as is the case across a whole range of other industries. "Unless sanctions are involved and voluntary codes are within a regulatory framework, you don't seem to get good outcomes." Examples presented by international speakers certainly supported this.

In Australia the number of complaints, as in New Zealand, is low – a fact often cited by the industry as evidence that the public 'doesn't give a hoot' about alcohol advertising. According to Sandra Jones, there are lots of reasons for low complaints. "The community voice is incredibly silent," she said, "people are immersed in alcohol advertising and one ad is not particularly worse than the next one. What's really needed is good research on community standards."

Ensure that a regulatory framework is put in place.

Speakers were in accord that the best way forward is for the government to take back policy control of alcohol advertising.

Dr Linda Hill

"I don't want us to miss this opportunity to have a strong regulatory framework . Then we can decide what we will allow and not allow — or whether it will include some industry codes of responsibility," said New Zealand social policy researcher Dr Linda Hill.

There was general agreement among speakers on the need for a strong focus on reducing exposure to alcohol advertising, particularly of young people. Support for a ban at least on broadcast advertising was a common theme, some pointing to the 'huge symbolic value' in limiting a product's ability to advertise on TV.

"I would like to see us reverse that 1992 experiment and get alcohol advertising off all broadcast media and off all electronic media — that could include cell phone technology as well as internet advertising. We also need to start prohibiting sports sponsorship because I think that is one of the major, major influences on our drinking culture," said Hill.

"There is value in removing alcohol advertising from some spheres at least." *– David Jernigan*

It was accepted that regulation on some media but not others may result in some displacement to more 'below the line' forms of marketing but, as Jernigan said, "it doesn't mean that taking steps to reduce exposure in a limited number of media is not a good thing to do".

Alcohol advertising that uses texting, competitions, websites and email is now prolific and very appealing to young people. Ways to control these as well as more novel developments are needed. Local speakers agreed that New Zealand needs a government agency to control, monitor and keep abreast of emerging developments in alcohol marketing.

"Most young people would probably find French alcohol advertising relatively boring — which is probably a good thing." *— Linda Hill*

France was held up by more than one speaker as an example of successful regulation in alcohol advertising. Almost all alcohol advertising in broadcast media is prohibited, as is alcohol sports sponsorship, and on other advertising only images of the product itself and its price is allowed.

Professor Casswell commented that legislation works largely in a symbolic way. "The message it gives is that yes, we are serious about this product, and that makes it easier for policy makers to put other effective policies in place."

"As doctors we were taught 'an ounce of prevention is worth a ton of cure'." *– Dr Viola Palmer*

The Alcohol Healthwatch symposia were generously supported by the Health Sponsorship Council and the Group Against Liquor Advertising (GALA), whose petition was instrumental in obtaining the review. GALA has a clear goal – to ban all sorts of alcohol advertising and phase out sponsorship. Chair of the group, Dr Viola Palmer, said that getting rid of alcohol advertising looked like 'a do-able thing' that would help to reduce the alcohol-related harm many of the members were were constantly seeing as doctors. She said that over the years of their struggle the nature of alcohol advertising has changed. "There's less on TV, but sponsorship is reaching its tentacles into New Zealand society." She is concerned at the lack of awareness of the issue among the public. "Unless there is a big push from people inside the community the politicians won't shift basically. I don't see why the public should be on the back foot having to make complaints."

Alcohol has had 'a dream run' compared to tobacco

Two speakers at the symposia provided insights from their experience with tobacco marketing, Sneha Paul from ASH, and

Alcohol Healthwatch director Rebecca Williams (left) calls for questions for the panel at the Auckland symposium

Iain Potter, CEO of the Health Sponsorship Council. From his experience managing the interim buying out of tobacco sponsorship, Potter learnt that sponsorship is the key to a "vast promotional opportunity". "Sponsorship allows advertising by stealth," he said. "We've still got a way to go with tobacco regulation, but tobacco is now much diminished — an invisible product."

"It ought to be about not having this product promoted to our children. " *— Associate Professor Jones*

In reflecting on the social context of alcohol advertising, Jones mused: "If some one came along today and said 'we have invented this new product that you can drink and it will kill and put in hospital a few thousand people a year, and is it okay if we advertise this product?' People would say 'no way'."

Visiting speakers encouraged New Zealanders to aim high with the review. "New Zealand is a leader in so many other ways in public health, particularly in tobacco. I hope that you continue to play a leadership role and inspire and frankly — shame us all," Jernigan said.

Greens' advertising bill ads to the mix

Further spotlighting the issue, in September the Green Party had selected from the ballot a private member's bill that seeks to severely restrict alcohol advertising.

The Liquor Advertising (Television and Radio) Bill would prohibit the broadcast of all liquor advertising in New Zealand. Green spokesperson Metiria Turei says that advertising alcohol is invariably associated with desired lifestyle images, effectively normalising and encouraging widespread alcohol use. The first reading of the bill is scheduled for early November.

International News

An alcohol strategy for the Western Pacific Region

Good news for the WHO Western Pacific Region, which includes New Zealand, is the recent endorsement by member states of a strategy to reduce alcohol-related harm in the Region. "The rising consumption of alcohol in the Western Pacific Region is reaching alarming proportions, especially among young people, but there is poor public awareness of the harmful effects of alcohol abuse," the WHO regional committee says.

The strategy will provide a framework for effective government policies and a guide for groups to advocate to their governments on alcohol issues.

In many developing countries in the region, per capita consumption is relatively low, but increasing rapidly. In China, for example, recorded annual per capita alcohol consumption rose from 0.75 litres in 1970 to 4.45 litres in 2001.Yet in many countries, the strategy says, public awareness of the harms of alcohol is almost totally lacking, recording systems are poor and there is a "complete lack of public health-oriented alcohol policy". Earlier onset of drinking and binge drinking among young people are of particular concern, as in Japan, where nearly 10% of young people have been defined as problem drinkers.

Effective actions identified in the strategy include: ensuring adequate public information and prevention programmes for high risk groups and settings; encouraging supportive environments; establishing and enforcing laws around availability, serving, and drink driving; taxation measures; establishing data collection systems and mechanisms to sustain the strategies; and providing support to civic and nongovernmental organisations to help them respond effectively to the problem.

Coming at an opportune time for New Zealand's deliberations on the regulation of alcohol advertising, the strategy also suggests that governments "regulate and respond to the marketing of alcoholic beverages and the sponsoring of cultural and sports events, in particular those aimed at young people".

World Health Organisation Western Pacific Region

Actions to control marketing include:

- designating a government agency responsible for enforcement of marketing regulations;

- regulating or banning, as appropriate, the marketing of alcoholic beverages; and

- encouraging greater responsibility among commercial interests, for example through codes of conduct for sale and marketing practices.

The strategy has been developed by the Western Pacific Regional Office of WHO, and was endorsed at a Regional Committee Meeting held in Auckland in September.

The catalyst for such regional strategies was the landmark WHO resolution on Public Health Problems Caused by Harmful Use of Alcohol, ratified in 2005. Regional strategies will be reported on back to the World Health Assembly in 2007.

It is hoped that the strategy will pave the way for concerted regional action, including stronger cooperation among countries and sub-regions.

Licensing News

More power for community objectors

But is Hawkins' bill enough?

The need for change to licensing laws that allow liquor outlets to proliferate and spring up in inappropriate locations, sometimes leaving local residents fuming and frustrated, has been focus of several recent *News and Views* articles. But despite years of drawing the attention of local and national government to the issue by communities and other advocates, nothing has been done. Community members are still powerless to have meaningful input into the location of liquor outlets in their neighbourhoods, and concern is growing that the number of licensed premises in New Zealand — significantly more per capita than in Australia — is contributing to crime, violence and other alcohol-related problems.

Prompted no doubt by concern from his own Manurewa electorate, Labour MP George Hawkins has drafted a private member's bill that aims to do just that — give local people more say about the set up and operation of liquor retail outlets. Hawkins' Sale of Liquor (Objections to Applications) Bill would amend the Act to allow any person to object to an application for an on or off-licence, providing they have evidence that the licence would have adverse impact on them. Licensing agencies would have the ability to take into account any matter relating to the impact of alcohol consumption on the wider community, however the Liquor Licensing Authority would have the power to dismiss "frivolous or vexatious" objections. The bill also requires an applicant to carry out a publicly notified evaluation of the social and economic impact of the proposed licence on the community.

Alcohol Healthwatch commends Mr Hawkins for his bill, but urges immediate government action on this issue. Director Rebecca Williams says: "We cannot afford to wait for the 'luck of the draw' approach of the ballot system on this issue. The current legislation has allowed communities to be swamped in liquor outlets, in many cases despite their protest. We have long called for changes to improve matters — such as requiring councils to develop policies on density and location of licensed premises, similar to those required under the Gambling Act. We have also recommended that social impact assessments on proposed premises are done, which would take account of any community objections. In Hawkins' bill, the onus is on the licensee for such an assessment, but it may be better if the cost of a council report is reflected in increased licence fees — which are comparatively low in New Zealand. This could enhance the perceived 'value' of a licence and encourage greater responsibility by licensees when operating it."

Sale of Liquor (Youth Harm Reduction) Amendment Bill progress report

The report of the Law and Order Select Committee is expected to be released shortly. Their report will include recommendations on the purchase age for alcohol and other matters contained in the bill. However it is expected that the committee will reserve any judgements on the advertising component until the completion of the advertising review.

ARFAN goes global

Auckland Region Fetal Alcohol Network

The Auckland Region Fetal Alcohol Network (ARFAN) once again marked FASD Awareness Day on September 9th this year. ARFAN supporters got Auckland church bells ringing at 9.09am to mark the day. They also undertook workshops, shared information at expos and conferences, and generally distributed information to raise awareness and to call for more action on FASD prevention and intervention.

One of the significant milestones this year was the opportunity for ARFAN to become affiliated with FASworld, an international collaboration of FASD advocates from around the world [www.fasworld.com]. This affiliation has enabled ARFAN to fly the FASworld Banner.

Although the focus of ARFAN is primarily regional awareness and action, ARFAN supporters across the length and breadth of New Zealand are linked to the network.

If you would like to be part of ARFAN network and receive updates on FASD matters, or if you would like further information, please contact the ARFAN coordinator Christine Rogan christine@ahw.co.nz

"Everyone is part of the solution"

Alcohol Healthwatch welcomes feedback on ***News and Views*** and encourages readers to suggest items for future editions.

ALCOHOL HEALTHWATCH

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Disclaimer: The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of Alcohol Healthwatch Trust or the Ministry of Health

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