



Taking policy action to reduce alcohol-fuelled harms

POLICY PLATFORM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Each year, alcohol products are responsible for almost 6,000 deaths among Australians aged 15 years and older and more than 144,000 hospitalisations.

The alcohol industry has seized on the challenges faced by Australians during the COVID-19 pandemic, promoting alcohol products as a way of coping with the challenges of lockdown and isolation at a time when people are vulnerable. Levels of alcohol-fuelled harm, including family violence and high-risk drinking, have increased for many during COVID-19 restrictions.

Alcohol contributes to health inequities affecting some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. This includes people at risk of family violence; people experiencing mental illness, trauma and alcohol dependence; and other at-risk groups. Alcohol products fuel family violence, child abuse and neglect, and harm to young people. These products contribute to up to 65 per cent of police-reported family violence incidents and 47 per cent of child abuse cases in Australia each year.

Alcohol use is one of the main causes of poor health globally. In recognition of the harm caused by alcohol, the Australian government has committed to a 10 per cent reduction in the harmful use of alcohol by 2028. There are many evidence-based actions that governments can take to reduce alcohol-fuelled harm. The National Alliance for Action on Alcohol has used the most up-to-date evidence to develop clear policy solutions that will reduce the harm caused by alcohol in Australia.

As a national alliance, our policy priorities are focused on the actions that the Australian Government can take to prevent and reduce the harm caused by the alcohol industry and its products in our communities. State, territory and local governments must also take strong policy action to reduce the harms caused by alcohol. The NAAA urges all governments to develop and implement policies that reflect an understanding of the drivers of alcohol-fuelled harms, are based on robust evidence, and utilise data and evaluation.

Australian governments need to act to ensure people and communities are placed ahead of alcohol industry profits. Governments can and should take more responsibility for regulating alcohol products. This includes introducing proven measures that reduce the harms from alcohol products and keep people healthy and well. We know what these measures are. Now all that is needed is action.

Priorities and recommendations

The NAAA recommends that the Australian Government should prioritise the following policy action areas to reduce alcohol-fuelled harm:

PRIORITY 1: Protect children from alcohol advertising

The alcohol industry advertises relentlessly through media and in places where children and young people can see it. Alcohol advertising makes children and young people more likely to start using alcohol products at a younger age and to drink more if they are already using alcohol. Voluntary, industry-led codes are ineffective for protecting children and young people from alcohol advertising.

Recommendations for the Australian Government:

- Reduce children's exposure to alcohol advertising by introducing independent, legislated controls that cover the volume, content and placement of all forms of alcohol advertising across all media and platforms.
- Phase out alcohol sponsorship of sports teams, sporting events and music events.
- Take immediate action to:
 - > remove the exemption in the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice that allows alcohol advertisements to be broadcast during sports programs
 - > extend the free-to-air television restrictions on alcohol advertising to subscription and catch-up television platforms, and
 - > end the Australian Government's participation in the ABAC Scheme.

PRIORITY 2: Support pricing policies that reduce alcohol-fuelled harm

The cheaper alcoholic products are, the more people drink, and the more they suffer harm. Policies to increase the price of alcohol products are among the most effective in reducing alcohol-fuelled harm.

Recommendations for the Australian Government:

- Introduce a volumetric tax across all alcohol products.
- Increase all alcohol tax by at least 10 per cent.

PRIORITY 3: Raise awareness of the harms caused by alcohol to inform and influence Australians

Many Australians are unaware of the range and magnitude of the harms caused by alcohol products, and most do not understand that alcohol causes cancer.

Recommendation for the Australian Government:

- Substantially invest in evidence-based, targeted and ongoing campaigns and preventative programs that increase awareness of alcohol harms.

PRIORITY 4: Prevent the consumption of alcohol products during pregnancy

Use of alcohol products during pregnancy is associated with a range of adverse consequences. This includes a higher risk of miscarriage, stillbirth, premature birth, low birth weight, and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). A large proportion of Australian women use alcohol in pregnancy, and many people are unaware of the risks. FASD is the leading cause of preventable developmental disabilities in Australia.

Recommendations for the Australian Government:

- Provide adequate investment to implement the *National FASD Strategic Action Plan 2018–2028*.
- Implement the findings from the Senate Community Affairs Committee inquiry into *Effective Approaches to Prevention, Diagnosis and Support for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder*.

PRIORITY 5: Prevent alcohol industry interference in policymaking

The alcohol industry uses the same tactics as the tobacco industry to ward off government regulation and undermine effective alcohol policies. Governments must prioritise the protection of alcohol policy development from influence by vested interests.

Recommendations for the Australian Government:

- Prohibit political donations from the alcohol industry.
- Prohibit the alcohol industry from being involved in developing alcohol policy.
- Reform lobbying roles to reduce opportunities for key employees to move between government and the alcohol industry, and increase the transparency of interactions between the two.

PRIORITY 6: Reduce harm from online sales and delivery of alcohol products

Online sales and rapid deliveries of alcohol products have increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, and have created a step change in alcohol availability and risk. People who use alcohol delivery services are more likely to be high-risk drinkers, and many use these services to keep drinking when their alcohol supplies are exhausted. Online retailers do not verify the age of people purchasing alcohol, and research has found that orders are often left unattended or ID is not checked. People often receive alcohol orders despite already being intoxicated.

Recommendations for state and territory governments:

- Prevent delivery of alcohol products within two hours of an order being placed, and between the hours of 10pm and 10am.
- Require age to be verified at the point of online purchase of alcohol products, and photo identification to be witnessed when alcohol orders are delivered or collected.
- Prevent deliveries of alcohol products being left unattended at any time.
- Prevent delivery of alcohol products to someone who is intoxicated.

About the National Alliance for Action on Alcohol

The National Alliance for Action on Alcohol (NAAA) is a coalition of health and community organisations from across Australia which aims to reduce alcohol-fuelled harm. The NAAA was formed in 2009 and represents more than 20 organisations representing a diverse range of interests, including public health, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, child and adolescent health, family and community services, and people with lived experience of alcohol-fuelled harm.

The broad coalition of interests represented by the NAAA highlights widespread concern in Australia about alcohol-fuelled harm and recognises the importance of cross-sector community partnerships. The impacts of alcohol are far-reaching, and Australian governments urgently need to implement policy changes as part of a coordinated strategy to drive and sustain action on this pressing community issue.

This is an abridged version of the NAAA Policy Platform.
To see the full policy platform go to actiononalcohol.org.au.

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