



## Alcohol advertising reach needs to be curbed says researcher

By TOBY HUSSEY

The Federal Government needs to take control of alcohol advertising regulations to protect young people, according to a Curtin University researcher.

McCusker Centre for Action on Alcohol and Youth chief executive Julia Stafford said Australia's current co-regulated advertising rules were insufficient to protect young Australians.

Ms Stafford said following a paper published by the Society for the Study of Addication which canvassed more than 35,000 participants, there was a clear indication young people who are exposed to alcohol marketing were more likely to begin drinking alcohol and binge drink.

Ms Stafford said currently alcohol products are only allowed to be advertised on television in Australia during programs expected to have an audience at least three-quarters adult-age and that was not good enough.

"The Federal Government needs to step in and introduce legislated controls to cover content placement and volume of all forms of alcohol marketing," Ms Stafford said.

"The primary focuses should be protecting young people, minimising young people's exposure to alcohol marketing and also reducing inappropriate content in that marketing as well."

Alcohol advertising is co-regulated in Australia between the Advertising Standards Bureau and the industry-run Alcoholic Beverages Advertising Code Scheme.

If a complaint is made about an advertisement for an alcohol product the Advertising Standards Bureau, using the Australian Association of National Advertisers guidelines, and ABACS review it. However those regulations only place a vague restriction on adverts to children not being for, or relate in any way to, alcohol products or draw any

association to companies that supply alcoholic products. The ABACS regulations do not permit advertising to minors, depictions of minors consuming or likely to consume alcohol, or even depictions of adults under 25-years-old drinking alcohol.

Despite these rules, Ms Stafford said ABACS' regulations were inadequate.

"They've used really vague language about not placing adverts in programs primarily aimed at minors," she said.

Ms Stafford said she was not in favour of a

packaging system as was introduced in 2012 for cigarettes sold in Australia but wanted a Federal investigation into television advertising laws and laws for advertising on social media.

"We're not trying to stop everybody drinking alcohol," she said. "It's about reducing the harm around alcohol. "We're seeing a lot of changes in moving away from some traditional media platforms like TV and to a much greater focus on digital environments. "There are big challenges with

age controls - that's flown under the radar for a long time and advertisers who have capitalised on that by advertising a lot on unregulated markets." Ms Stafford said despite the 75 per cent adult-age viewer requirement before an advert for an alcoholic product can be run, for major shows the under-age group could still contain a substantial number of viewers. "When you look at some of the TV data we have - for example the MasterChef grand finale last year - young people zero to 17 years

old only represented 15 per cent of the audience but that was 266,000 young people."

ABAC Chair Alan Ferguson said the new rules must be met by alcohol marketers and also prevent alcohol advertising appearing with programs aimed at under 18s.

"They must meet existing media industry codes, must utilise any available age restriction controls to exclude under 18s from the audience and electronic direct mail must not be sent to under 18s," he said.



McCusker Centre's Julia Stafford says federal pressure needs to be put on alcohol advertisers to protect children.