

Stop advertising alcohol on public transport, urges report

Removing alcohol advertising from buses is a way for governments to take action, says Alcohol Advertising Review Board

Melissa Davey

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A new report from the Alcohol Advertising Review Board calls on state and territory governments to legislate to remove all alcohol advertising from public transport and transit stops.

The ACT is the only jurisdiction to have banned alcohol advertising on public buses following changes to policy introduced by the minister for territory and municipal services, Shane Rattenbury, in September.

While the federal government retains regulatory control of substantial advertising policy, removing alcohol advertising from buses was a way for the state and territory governments to show they supported taking action on such advertising without requiring federal government approval, the board's report released on Thursday says.

The board's annual report, released in September, found a review of a two-litre cask of pineapple punch-flavoured Vodka Cruiser on the website of a major alcohol retailer apparently written by a 12-year-old, and examples of large alcohol advertisements on bus shelters located just outside of school gates.

"There is a need for strong, independent, legislated controls on all forms of alcohol advertising and promotion in Australia" the latest report from the board said.

"Leaving regulation of advertising to the alcohol and advertising industries does not work; the industries have demonstrated again and again that they are unable to prevent the exposure of children and young people to alcohol promotion, and are unable to ensure that all forms of alcohol advertising and promotion are socially responsible."

The board's chair, Prof Fiona Stanley, has written to all state and territory health and transport ministers calling for a phasing out of alcohol advertising on public transport and transit stops.

A foreword to the report, authored by Dr David Jernigan from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg school of public health in the US, described the report as an important contribution to the debates around alcohol advertising and youth occurring around the world.

“With alcohol as the leading cause of death and disability among young males ages 15-24 in all regions of the world except the Eastern Mediterranean, and among females in that age group in the wealthy countries and the Americas, there is ample cause for concern about the short- and long-term impact of youth exposure to alcohol advertising,” he said.

In 2014, the Outdoor Media Association listed alcoholic beverages as ninth in the top 20 advertising categories, with a spend of \$27.5 million. An analysis of alcohol advertising expenditure in Australia led by Cancer Council Victoria found outdoor advertising expenditure on billboards alone increased from 1997 to reach a peak of \$45.8 million in 2007.

The Alcohol Advertising Review Board was developed by the McCusker Centre for Action on Alcohol and Youth and Cancer Council WA. The executive officer for the McCusker Centre, Julia Stafford, said the Board had received 130 complaints about alcohol advertisements on public transport sites by the end of last year.

“We’re still waiting for some serious actions by the federal government to introduce strong controls on all forms of alcohol advertising,” she said.

“We’ve identified public transport sites as opportunities to do something to reduce children’s exposure to alcohol without the need to wait for federal government action.”

The chief executive of the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education, Michael Thorne, said he believed state and territory governments should be banning alcohol advertising on everything they owned, including on sporting grounds.

He said a survey conducted by FARE this year found of people with a child under 18, 28% reported their children were exposed to alcohol advertisements at a bus or train stop alone.

However, Thorne said he believed state and territory governments were starting to take strong action against the alcohol industry rather than wait for the federal government to lead.

“The NSW government is responsible for the first rollback in alcohol venue trading hours in 100 years, and now we have the Queensland government advocating for a ‘last drinks’ policy,” Thorne said.

“Frankly, the states are leading the Commonwealth government, which has repeatedly failed to deal with alcohol-related harms.”

The report follows a call from the Public Health Association of Australia on Tuesday for changes to Australia’s alcohol policies, including reforming alcohol pricing, availability and marketing.

“Pricing will play the most significant role,” the association’s CEO, Michael Moore, said. “A change in the tax regime increasing alcohol excise by 10% will reduce availability, have an impact on chronic disease and reduce alcohol-fuelled violence.”

Economic modelling commissioned by FARE has also shown an alcohol tax increase of 10% and more equitable taxation of wine would result in a 9.4% reduction in alcohol consumption while minimally affecting moderate drinkers.

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