



# Drunk on booze health halo

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THE alcohol industry has been criticised for marketing drinks under a “health halo” which misleads consumers into thinking alcoholic drinks are healthy.

The alcohol industry is now offering products such as vegan-wines, low-carb beers and sugar-free pre-mixed spirits to ensure health conscious Aussies keep on sipping.

The move mirrors a new trend flagged by market re-



search company Nielsen, which identified that Aussies were switching to perceived healthier drink alternatives at a

rapid rate, meaning soft drinks were out and alternatives like soda water and kombucha were in. Kombucha’s popularity has grown sevenfold in the last two years and is now

being used as a pre-mixer for alcoholic drinks.

Nielsen 2019 statistics show 4.3 million Aussies believe there are positive benefits to drinking beer and 28 per cent view beer as a “natural product”.

More than 7.6 million Aussies believe there are positive benefits to drinking wine and five million said it was import-

ant to them that wine is additive and preservative free.

Julia Stafford, a researcher at the WA Public Health Ad-

vocacy Institute, has called for stricter regulations for alcohol advertising as she says current legislation is “weak”. She wants the Government to intervene and put a stop to “health halo” alcohol advertising.

“It’s a really big concern that alcohol companies are trying to make drinks look healthier when really it’s the alcohol content of these products that is the major health concern,” she said.

“It doesn’t matter what you put with it, all the risks that

come with consuming alcohol stay the same ... intoxication, violence, injuries, drink driving and longer term risks of heart disease, cancer, stroke and chronic health conditions.”

Ms Stafford, who released findings late 2018 which concluded current regulation did not go far enough to restrict alcohol brands from making health related claims, said mixing alcohol with a healthy mixer did not make the drink healthy. Kombucha, fermented tea used to improve diges-

tion and immunity, is increasingly being used in bars and at-home as a drink mixer but Ms Stafford said it loses any potential health benefit once a shot of booze is added.

Andrew Buttery, the head of

sales of Australian kombucha brand MOJO, disagreed.

He was confident MOJO-branded kombucha did not lose its effectiveness when mixed with alcohol. He said drinkers were choosing “quality over quantity” when they mixed with kombucha.