

25 October 2019

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission to Inquiry into age verification for online wagering and online pornography

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry into age verification for online wagering and online pornography. The Alcohol Programs Team at the Public Health Advocacy Institute of WA (PHAIWA), Curtin University, is committed to reducing harms from alcohol by promoting evidence-based approaches. We have been actively involved in work to reduce underage people's access to alcohol, including alcohol bought online and delivered to a home.

While we recognise that alcohol is currently out of scope for the inquiry, we write to you to ask that you consider age-gating processes to help prevent the sale of alcohol to young people and reduce young people's exposure to online marketing materials by alcohol brands in Australia.

PHAIWA Alcohol Programs Team works closely with a range of stakeholders working to reduce harm caused by the sale and promotion of alcohol. PHAIWA supports the submission made by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education to the current inquiry, and wishes to make the following comments.

Age verification for online sale of alcohol

Currently, it is illegal to sell alcohol to children aged under 18 years in every state and territory in Australia. However, current legislation has fallen behind when it comes to developments in the online sale of alcohol. With the recent growth of online sales of alcohol, there is increasing concern among public health organisations about the lack of controls for alcohol bought online and subsequently, young people's access to alcohol.

Current age-verification procedures can be easily circumvented by young people. Examples of commonly used weak age verification procedures include warnings on websites that customers must be over 18 years old, relying on the use of manual entry of date of birth or a tick box to confirm a customer is 18 years old or older, and relying on the use of credit cards to verify age at the time of purchase (pre-paid credit cards can be purchased by underage young people).



Earlier this year, NSW Health conducted an audit of online liquor licensees to assess the parameters in place to protect young people under 18 years from purchasing alcohol online.¹ The audit found an absence of effective proof of age checks. Sixty per cent of the 215 websites audited did not require the purchaser to declare their date of birth, or to declare that they are 18 years or older. It also found that debit cards can be obtained by minors so these cannot be relied upon as proof of age.

We encourage the Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs to consider ways to meaningfully prevent young people from accessing alcohol bought online through comprehensive age verification procedures during purchase and delivery of alcohol. We believe that at the point of purchase, the retailer must require the purchaser to have their photo ID verified through a reputable provider before they can start ordering alcohol remotely. We also believe that there should be strong measures in place to prevent the use of another person's identification and log in detail by underage people; this can be achieved by ensuring that good age verification procedures are also followed during delivery of alcohol.

Age-gating processes on alcohol brand websites and social media accounts

Current age-gating processes on alcohol brand websites and social media accounts are inadequate at preventing young people's exposure to online alcohol advertising. There does not appear to be in place any effective controls to prevent young people's exposure to online alcohol advertising, with Australian research finding that age verification controls on websites are largely ineffective.² One in five young people aged 16 to 24 years reported that they had visited an alcohol brand page on Facebook, including 10% of those aged under 18 years.³

Research shows that liking or following alcohol marketing pages on social media is common among young Australians and is associated with riskier alcohol use and an earlier start to drinking.⁴ Significant associations exist between exposure to internet-based alcohol-related content and intentions to drink and positive attitudes towards drinking among young people.⁵ Vulnerable consumers and children are the ones most likely to be impacted by exposure to unsuitable advertising.

There have been several complaints to the self-regulatory alcohol marketing system, the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code Scheme, about alcohol brands failing to use age restriction controls. For example, a complaint about a Premix King Facebook page was upheld in April 2018 as the advertiser

¹ NSW Health, Northern Sydney Local Health District. Online Liquor Gets Audited. 2019. NSLHD Health Promotion Service. Available from: <https://www.nslhd.health.nsw.gov.au/HealthInformation/HealthPromotion/Pages/Projects/Alcohol/OLGA/OLGA.aspx>

² Jones SC, Thom JA, Davoren S, et al. Internet filters and entry pages do not protect children from online alcohol marketing. *J Public Health Policy*. 2014; 35(1):75-90.

³ McClure AC, Tanski SE, Li Z, et al. Internet alcohol marketing and underage alcohol use. *Pediatrics*. 2016; 137(2).

⁴ Carrotte ER, Dietze PM, Wright CJ, et al. Who 'likes' alcohol? Young Australians' engagement with alcohol marketing via social media and related alcohol consumption patterns. *Aust N Z J Public Health*. 2016; 40(5):474-479

⁵ Gupta H, Pettigrew S, Lam T, et al. A Systematic Review of the Impact of Exposure to Internet-Based Alcohol-Related Content on Young People's Alcohol Use Behaviours. *Alcohol Alcohol*. 2016; 51(6):763-771

failed to prevent under 18 year olds from accessing the page.⁶ Despite the complaint being upheld, age-gating has still not been implemented on the Premix King social media pages.⁷ This highlights the need for much stronger age-gating processes, as well as monitoring to ensure compliance.

Thank you for the opportunity to raise these important issues with you. Should you wish to clarify any matters raised in this submission, please contact the Alcohol Programs Team at the Public Health Advocacy Institute of WA on (08) 9266 9079.

Yours sincerely,

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⁶ The Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code Scheme. ABAC Adjudication Panel Determination No 33/18. Available from: <http://www.abac.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/33-18-Determination-Premix-King-Ascot-Vale-April-2018.pdf>

⁷ Premix King Warrnambool [cited Oct 24 2019]. Available from: <https://www.facebook.com/pmkwarrnambool>