Making the Case for Alcohol Policy

An NCD Advocacy Document

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AP18, April 11-13 2018
As required by the Alcohol Policy 18 Conference, I/we have signed a disclosure statement and note the following conflict(s) of interest:

None
About us

- Vital Strategies is a global health organization that seeks to accelerate progress on the world’s most pressing health problems.
- Our team combines evidence-based strategies with innovation to help develop and implement sound public health policies, manage programs efficiently, strengthen data systems, conduct research, and design strategic communication campaigns for policy and behavior change.
- Program areas across 60 counties: tobacco control, obesity control, alcohol policy, road safety, environment, healthy cities, maternal health, TB trials.

**Globally, nationally, and locally**

- To find out more visit [www.vitalstrategies.org](http://www.vitalstrategies.org) or Twitter [@VitalStrat](https://twitter.com/VitalStrat).
Point of the document

• To provide common language, framing and perspective to advocates
• To contribute to a common terminology and language in the field
• To engage INGOS and other non-alcohol specialist advocates in alcohol policy, e.g., tobacco, obesity, HIV, women’s rights, and TB advocates.
• To come together in our messaging
• For clarity around what the specific policy areas for advocacy are
• For clearer messaging and more education about the industry
Point of the document

• The global public health response to the harms of alcohol consumption is not commensurate with the health, social and economic burdens

• In contrast to responses to other drivers NCDs, governments pay relatively little attention to alcohol policy

Joint project of Vital Strategies, GAPA, IOGT and the NCD Alliance
Key messages

• 4 x 4: Alcohol is one of the **four leading** preventable NCD risk factors
• Among 20-39 year olds approximately **25% of deaths** are attributable to alcohol
• Alcohol use is increasing the most in low- and middle-income countries especially Africa and Asia
• **We know what works.** There are effective, evidence-based measures available for all countries
• Alcohol is a major obstacle to sustainable development
• The alcohol industry has the financial and political power to **block and derail public policies** that could threaten its profits and promote public health
Burden and imperative

Key messages: Disease and social burden

_Harming One’s Self_

- Alcohol consumption is linked to diabetes, heart disease, liver cirrhosis, stroke, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and seven cancers including mouth, liver, colon and breast

_Harming others_

- Alcohol use contributes to in homicides, car crashes, child abuse, violence against women and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
- _In Australia, alcohol was involved in 34% of intimate partner violence and 29% of family violence incidents_
Burden and imperative

Key messages: The economic burden

Alcohol consumption taxes the health system, the justice system, public safety, productivity and social welfare

- Every year, alcohol is estimated to cost society $249 billion in the US and €156 billion in the EU
- The economic burden of alcohol consumption accounts for 12% of South Africa’s Gross Domestic Product
Key messages: The expanding burden

Low and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs)

• Alcohol consumption risks and consequences are magnified in LMICs where people are more likely to be in poor health

Young People:

• In South Africa, about 25% of adolescents report binge drinking in the past month

Women

• Because of their physical composition, most women are at a higher risk of brain, heart and liver damage from alcohol
Global development

• UN 2030 Agenda’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
  • Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including ... the harmful use of alcohol

• WHO Global Action Plan on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDS)
  • Reduce the harmful use of alcohol by at least 10% by 2025
The alcohol industry

The alcohol industry uses advertising to accomplish two goals:

• Lure and recruit new customers
• Normalize alcohol use in new markets

Consolidated industry made up of a small group of large, transnational companies control over half of the world market

Companies of this magnitude prevent governments across the world from implementing evidence-based measures to prevent and reduce alcohol harm
The alcohol industry
Luring new customers

Young People
- Global ads promise what’s important to young people: happiness, success, fun, sexuality, and popularity
- Ads are found where young people congregate: online on Snapchat, Facebook and Instagram

Women
- Ad campaigns paint alcohol as a balm for the stress of raising children and modern life
- *The industry markets alcohol brands to women using sweet flavors and female characters such as Hello Kitty*
The alcohol industry
Normalize alcohol in new markets

Corporate Social Responsibility
• Appearance of a social conscience
• Actual purpose of marketing
• Ex: “Responsible Drinking” programs for drivers, “Buy a Lady a Drink” fundraisers

Lack of Regulation
• Most common form of regulation is self regulation
• A review of 100 studies of voluntary industry codes across 20 countries found that the alcohol industry did not follow its own codes
Policy best buys

Increase excise taxes

• Win-Win-Win: discourage consumption, reduce alcohol related harms, and raise money for public health initiatives
• *In British Columbia, a 10% increase in the average minimum price of all alcoholic beverages was associated with a 32% reduction in alcohol attributable deaths*

Challenges

• Taxes are often set too low to affect change
• Smuggling and illicit alcohol production (the alcohol industry has been known to overstate this)
Policy best buys
Restricting availability of retail alcohol

- Limiting public availability of/access to alcohol reduces use and can change social and cultural norms

- *In Germany, studies found that regulating the hours alcohol is sold has the potential to prevent 54,000 injuries a year*

Challenges
- Alcohol use is expanding in countries that lack regulator and enforcement capacities to restrict access to harmful use of alcohol
Policy best buys
Restrictions on alcohol advertising

• Advertising and marketing contribute to the initiation of alcohol use, to binge drinking, and to alcohol-related injuries
• For heavy drinkers, alcohol advertisements increase cravings

Challenges
• The alcohol industry markets and advertises through a broad range of channels, many of which are completely unregulated
Call to action

Civil society organizations should:
• Advocate for evidence-based cost-effective policy solutions
• Educate the public/policy makers about harmful alcohol use
• Hold governments accountable to reduce alcohol harm
• Monitor/expose unethical alcohol industry practices

Countries should:
• Make alcohol policy a top priority
• Implement WHO Best Buys interventions of NCD prevention

WHO and UN agencies should:
• Provide countries with toolkits for reducing the harmful use of alcohol
• Oppose the development of partnerships with the alcohol industry
How the alcohol, and food industry are using tactics perfected by the tobacco industry to delay, derail and deter sound policy.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Déjà vu</th>
<th>Tobacco &amp; Alcohol</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employ sophisticated billion-dollar marketing budgets often geared toward youth</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Highlight illegal distribution and cross-border smuggling to deter policies on raising taxes</td>
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<td>Offer corporate social responsibility programs to encourage good will, win favor and discourage legal policy</td>
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<td>Target vulnerable populations in developing countries as high income countries adopt policies to limit use</td>
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Growing the movement

An effective alcohol policy movement will require an enormous, sustained commitment by advocates and partners beyond those normally engaged with alcohol including:

- Civil society
- Government and elected officials
- Health professionals
- Educators
- Community partners
- Economic developers
- Public safety personnel

ex: Enforce policies to limit drinking and driving to reduce the negative consequences of alcohol use
Talking to the media

• Read the news to identify interested journalists
• Build long-term relationships with journalists
• Where appropriate, provide a human face to illustrate and communicate the story

*Key messages for media:*
• 3.3 million deaths a year result from harmful use of alcohol worldwide
• Youths who start using alcohol before the age of 15, are 6x more likely to develop alcohol dependence or abuse later in life
Glossary

Document includes a glossary of alcohol-related terms as well as a list of industry preferred terms to be aware of.

Example industry preferred terms include:

- **Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse**: The alcohol industry’s use of this term suggests that alcohol is only a problem when someone uses it in a way that is not intended.

- **Drunk Driving**: An industry-preferred term that suggests drinking and driving is okay provided one isn’t “drunk.”
Thank you

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