

# Big Alcohol attempts to undermine Global Action Plan

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Alcohol companies and their lobby groups are systematically working to undermine and water down global alcohol policies that would reduce the harms associated with their products, according to a new report.

The report from the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research (CAPR) at La Trobe University, released today by the Foundation for Alcohol and Research Education (FARE), found that Big Alcohol deliberately worked to water down the World Health Organization's (WHO) draft *Global alcohol action plan 2022-2030 to strengthen implementation of the Global Strategy to Reduce the Harmful Use of Alcohol* (the Action Plan).

In 2010, the WHO released the *Global Strategy to Reduce the Harmful Use of Alcohol* (the Global Strategy). However, in 2020, the WHO commenced the development of the Action Plan after progress on the Global Strategy had been slow.

The alcohol companies and their lobby groups made 60 submissions to the consultation on the Action Plan, making up nearly a quarter (24 per cent) of all submissions.

Many of these submissions made misleading claims and misrepresented evidence in an attempt to cast doubt on public health measures that are proven to prevent and reduce the harms from alcohol. The analysis found:

- Nearly all these submissions (90 per cent) called for greater alcohol company involvement as a stakeholder/partner in harm reduction and policymaking
- More than half (56 per cent) of the submissions cast doubt on the WHO 'SAFER' initiatives – evidence-based policies that target the price, availability and promotion of alcohol products, as well as policies to improve health services and prevention of drink driving.

The report also found that only 36 per cent (17) of these submissions referenced any specific evidence to support their arguments, and of these, ten misinterpreted the evidence, and nine promoted weak evidence.

CAPR Distinguished Professor, Professor Robin Room, said that the findings show that alcohol companies and their lobby groups are using well-known tactics to water down health policy.

"In terms of the use of evidence, our analysis identified alcohol industry actors employing practices of misrepresentation, misinterpretation and promotion of weak evidence over stronger evidence, as researchers looking at policy submissions elsewhere from the industry have also found," Professor Room said.

The WHO has released a revised draft of the Global Action Plan. FARE compared the Working Document and third draft of the Global Action Plan and found changes consistent with recommendations made by alcohol companies and their lobbyists, including:

- A decreased emphasis on implementing SAFER initiatives - evidence-based policies that target the price, availability and promotion of alcohol products, as well as policies to improve health services and prevention of drink driving , and
- changing actions relating to alcohol marketing, enabling alcohol companies to set their own standards and rules rather than governments.

FARE CEO, Ms Caterina Giorgi, said that alcohol companies have been lobbying for decades to minimise health concerns and delay effective measures to reduce the harm from alcohol.

“Alcohol causes considerable harm to millions of people across the world, which is why strong global action is needed to ensure that governments are doing all they can to reduce the harm from alcohol,” Ms Giorgi said.

“In Australia, we’ve seen alcohol companies fight for 20 years against pregnancy health warnings. We’ve seen them attempt to water down the National Alcohol Strategy and stall the release of the National Alcohol Guidelines. We’re now seeing their efforts to weaken Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), the independent agency that oversaw the process for the development of pregnancy health warnings.

“Alcohol companies have proven time and time again that they only engage to weaken efforts by governments to protect the health and wellbeing of the community. They should have no role in the development of health policy.”

Movendi International President, Ms Kristina Sperkova, said that the global alcohol industry is doing everything it can to derail the WHO effort to accelerate action on alcohol as a public health priority.

“Countries around the world report that alcohol industry interference is the biggest reason for lack of progress in reducing the alcohol burden. The alcohol industry is undermining the science and misleading the public on the harms associated with their products,” Ms Sperkova said.

“After a lost decade for alcohol policy progress, the alcohol industry should not be allowed any longer to disguise the fact that their products cause cancer, are toxic, addictive, and teratogenic. The alcohol industry has a fundamental conflict of interest, and the WHO should protect its health policy formulation processes from alcohol industry interference.”

The WHO is due to consider the Global Action Plan at the 150th session of the Executive Board of WHO held between 24 and 29 January 2022.

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The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education** (FARE) is the leading not-for-profit organisation working towards an Australia free from alcohol harms. We do this through developing evidence-informed policy, enabling people-powered advocacy and delivering health promotion campaigns.

FARE has been working with communities across the country to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians for 20 years. To learn more about us and our work visit [www.fare.org.au](http://www.fare.org.au).