

Media Release

Parents not tuned in to health impact of alcohol ad loophole

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New research* from the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) has revealed only one in four Australians are aware of a loophole that allows alcohol advertisements to air during weekend sports programs before 8:30pm.

The loophole allows alcohol companies to use high-rating sports, including the AFL, which begins on Thursday, to broadcast more than 1,500 additional alcohol advertisements each season**. The RACP is concerned that children are the collateral damage in the marketing campaigns of the big brewers and parents are being caught unawares.

The RACP President Dr Catherine Yelland said the loophole, part of the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice, needs to be closed.

“It is unacceptable that the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) allow this to happen,” explained Dr Yelland.

“On every other day of the week, during every other program on television, ACMA recognises that alcohol advertisements are harmful to children and does not allow for them to be shown before 8.30pm. Why are sports programs an exception?”

“It is also a concern that the majority of parents appear to be unaware of this loophole. Many most likely believe that their children are watching sports programs which are age appropriate. The reality is however that the alcohol advertisements being aired are for a much more mature audience.”

Dr Yelland said although alcohol advertisements were not the only factor, multiple studies point to their health impact.

“We know exposure to alcohol advertising encourages children to start drinking earlier, to binge drink more often and to start a journey toward established drinking and exposure to other alcohol-related harms.

“It’s therefore not surprising that the peak age for the onset of alcohol use disorders is just 18 years old***.

Dr Yelland said alcohol companies have a tendency to heavily target the AFL, and other sports including cricket and the NRL, with their marketing. A 2015 study** revealed there were 1942 free-to-air alcohol advertisements during broadcasts of one season of AFL, of which 47 per cent were aired between 6:00am and 8:29pm.

“With the AFL beginning this weekend, I’d encourage parents to keep a tally of how many times they spot alcohol marketing, either at the ground, on a player’s singlet or on the TV. I have no doubt the number will surprise and shock them.”

Ends

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* Based on attitudinal research completed by Essential Media on behalf of the RACP in March 2017. Sample size of 1004 respondents.

** Carr S, O'Brien K, Ferris J, et al. Child and adolescent exposure to alcohol advertising in Australia's major televised sports. *Drug and Alcohol Review* 2015: DOI: 10.1111/dar.12326.

*** Degenheart L, Hall W, Teesson M, Lynskey M. Alcohol use disorders in Australia: findings from the National Survey of Mental Health and Well-Being. NDARC Technical Report No. 97; 2000.

About The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP): The RACP trains, educates and advocates on behalf of more than 15,000 physicians and 7,500 trainee physicians across Australia and New Zealand.

The College represents a broad range of medical specialties including general medicine, paediatrics and child health, cardiology, respiratory medicine, neurology, oncology, public health medicine, occupational and environmental medicine, palliative medicine, sexual health medicine, rehabilitation medicine, geriatric medicine and addiction medicine. Beyond the drive for medical excellence, the RACP is committed to developing health and social policies which bring vital improvements to the wellbeing of patients.

The College offers 60 training pathways. These lead to the award of one of seven qualifications that align with 45 specialist titles recognised by the Medical Board of Australia or allow for registration in nine vocational scopes with the Medical Council of New Zealand.