

Pre-budget submission 2021-2022

The National Alliance for Action on Alcohol (NAAA) is a coalition of health and community organisations from across Australia which aims to reduce alcohol-fuelled harm. The NAAA represents more than 20 organisations with a diverse range of interests, including public health, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, child and adolescent health, family and community services and people with lived experience of alcohol-fuelled harm.

The NAAA welcomes the revised National Health and Medical Research Council Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Alcohol (Guidelines) released on 8 December 2020.¹

The Guidelines make the following evidence-based recommendations to reduce the risk of short and long-term harm from alcohol:

1. Healthy men and women should drink no more than 10 standard drinks per week and no more than 4 standard drinks on any one day. The less you drink, the lower risk of harm.
2. Children under 18 should not drink any alcohol.
3. Women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy should not drink alcohol. For women who are breastfeeding, not drinking alcohol is safest for their baby.

[Public health campaign on Guidelines and harms caused by alcohol](#)

The revised Guidelines will only be effective in informing Australians and encouraging lower risk drinking if they are effectively translated and promoted.

The NAAA congratulates the Government for its 2020 commitment to a three-year national campaign that will improve awareness of the harm caused by drinking alcohol during pregnancy. This is an important initiative that will help to support Australian women to have alcohol free pregnancies.

In the 2021-2022 federal budget, the NAAA proposes that the Government take the next step and provide sustained investment in an ongoing public health campaign that raises awareness of the revised Guidelines and the short and long-term harms caused by alcohol products. A campaign that effectively communicates the Guidelines to the Australian public will support Australians to make informed choices so that they can stay healthy.

Last year, all Australian jurisdictions committed to a 10 per cent reduction in the harmful use of alcohol by 2028 as part of the National Alcohol Strategy (NAS). The first objective of the NAS under Priority 4 (promoting healthier communities) is to improve awareness and understanding of alcohol harms in the Australian community. The NAS sets out policy options for achieving this, including to promote and translate the revised Guidelines to support informed decisions about alcohol consumption and promote better public understanding of alcohol harms, and development of public health campaigns promoting the risks and harms from alcohol consumption.

Australians need to receive more health messages that communicate the harms caused by alcohol products and fewer messages that portray alcohol as part of Australia's culture. Each year in Australia, there are more than 4,000 alcohol-related deaths in Australia, and more than 70,000 hospital admissions. Alcohol products fuel family violence, child abuse and neglect and harm to young people. These products cause at least 40 medical conditions, including seven different types of cancers, FASD and other chronic diseases.²

Public health campaigns are a powerful way to change attitudes and behaviour. These campaigns have been shown to be effective in building knowledge and changing health behaviour when implemented as part of a comprehensive approach and when they achieve repeated exposure.³ This is most notable in relation to reducing tobacco use and reducing the prevalence of driving under the influence of alcohol.^{4,5,6,7} A sustained, targeted and well-funded campaign on the harms caused by alcohol would raise awareness, help de-normalise alcohol use and encourage behaviour change.

Key elements of an effective campaign

Any campaign will need to be multi-faceted, so that it reaches varying target groups through traditional media and digital media platforms. Media campaigns can be strengthened through locally led community campaigns.

We encourage the Government to ensure that any campaign is evidence-based and tested on the target audiences, to ensure messages are effective and avoid unintended consequences and stigmatisation. The Guidelines must be translated into messages that are clear, easy to understand and relatable.

It is important that sustained investment include an allocation for independent, robust evaluation which will help inform the development of ongoing campaigns.

Any campaign must be developed independently of industry and industry-funded organisations. This is because industry's primary goal is to sell more alcohol and maximise profit. The obvious conflict of interest means that industry-managed campaigns would be unlikely to paint an honest picture of the harms caused by alcohol or be effective to change attitudes or behaviour. Recent Australian research found that alcohol harm reduction advertisements produced by alcohol industry affiliated organisations were less effective for motivating people to reduce alcohol consumption than advertisements developed by public health organisations.⁸

The NAAA encourages the Government to invest in an ongoing powerful public health campaign in the next federal budget.

It is important to note that campaigns are one important component of the comprehensive approach that the Government must take to reduce alcohol-fuelled harm in Australia. We encourage you to review our [Policy Platform](#), which presents a range of clear solutions.

Key budget asks

Invest in an ongoing national campaign to communicate the Guidelines and raise awareness of the harms caused by alcohol

1. Invest \$25 million over three years in a national evidence-based, targeted campaign and to effectively communicate the Guidelines to Australians and raise awareness of the harms caused by alcohol.
2. Award contracts to organisations that are not affiliated with the alcohol industry.

¹ Australian Government. National Health and Medical Research Council. Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol, 2020. National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council and Universities Australia. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

² Australian Government. National Health and Medical Research Council. Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol, 2020. National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council and Universities Australia. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

³ Wakefield, M.A., B. Loken, and R.C. Hornik, Mass media campaigns to change health behaviour. *The Lancet*, 2010. 376(9748): p. 1261-1271

⁴ Durkin, S., E. Brennan, and M. Wakefield, Mass media campaigns to promote smoking cessation among adults: an integrative review. *Tobacco Control*, 2012. 21(2): p. 127-138.

⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Preventing tobacco use among youth and young adults: a report of the Surgeon General, 2012, US Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health: Atlanta, GA.

⁶ Wakefield, M.A., et al., Impact of tobacco control policies and mass media campaigns on monthly adult smoking prevalence. *American Journal of Public Health*, 2008. **98**(8): p. 1443-1450.

⁷ Elder, R.W., et al., Effectiveness of mass media campaigns for reducing drinking and driving and alcohol-involved crashes: a systematic review. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 2004. **27**(1): p. 57-65.

⁸ Brennan E, Schoenaker DAJM, Durkin SJ, *et al* Comparing responses to public health and industry-funded alcohol harm reduction advertisements: an experimental study *BMJ Open* 2020;**10**:e035569. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2019-035569.