

Embargoed until 12:01am Wednesday 15 July 2020

CONSUMERS VOTE FOR A RED, BLACK AND WHITE ‘HEALTH WARNING’ LABEL ON ALCOHOL

15 July 2020: First-ever consumer testing of the most effective alcohol warning label has found a red, black and white label saying ‘health warning’ was the best in drawing attention to the risks of alcohol use and pregnancy.

The consumer testing, conducted by IPSOS for the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE), compares the effectiveness of five different warnings, building on years of evidence-based work by the food standards authority, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ).



The consumer testing compared the evidence-based warning developed by FSANZ (warning 1) with other designs that the alcohol industry has been lobbying Ministers to adopt.

FARE CEO Caterina Giorgi says, “The consumer testing found the vast majority of people (96 per cent) associate danger and hazards with a red, black and white-coloured warning label, while only four per cent of people perceive a label without the colour red to be a warning”.

“Having a red, black and white label is important so the message can be understood by all Australians regardless of their literacy levels or cultural backgrounds,” Ms Giorgi said.

“The majority of people (73 per cent) were either ‘very unlikely’ or ‘unlikely’ to notice the warning in the alcohol company’s brand colours with a transparent background, known as ‘contrast’. And yet the alcohol industry is lobbying Ministers to adopt a camouflaged label, which would, in effect, be invisible,” she said.

The vast majority of consumers surveyed (95 per cent) also agreed that people have a right to know that drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause lifelong harm to an unborn baby, and Ms Giorgi says Ministers have a responsibility to raise awareness of this risk among all Australians.



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“Messages about alcohol use in pregnancy aren’t just for women who are pregnant, but are relevant and important for the whole community. The consumer testing found that a label with the term ‘pregnancy warning’ is far less relevant to people (24 per cent) than the signal wording ‘health warning’, which was relevant to 67 per cent,” Ms Giorgi said.

“The signal wording ‘health warning’ is a critical component of an effective warning because the views of people in a woman’s social network has a bearing on whether or not they drink alcohol before, during and after their pregnancy,” she said.



Ms Giorgi says, “This latest consumer testing will give Ministers further evidence to support the effective red, black and white pregnancy health warning on alcohol products when they meet to vote on the warning on Friday”.

FARE is working alongside many community and health organisations, including the Australian Medical Association (AMA), to support and urge food safety Ministers in Australia and New Zealand to introduce a visible, honest pregnancy health warning label.

An Open Letter, which has been signed by more than 3,500 community leaders and advocates and 150 organisations, has today been sent to all Ministers on the Forum on Food Regulation (the Forum).

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said the AMA is deeply concerned about the serious health consequences, including Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), from drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

“Most Australians don't understand the true extent of this harm. That is why we need a highly visible and clear easy-to-understand warning label for alcohol products,” Dr Bartone said.

“All the research and evidence indicate that red colouring, contrast, and appropriate wording are key to a noticeable warning label.

“The cost to industry of implementing these features in a label is minimal compared to the benefits a clear warning will have for the health of Australian children and their families.

“The AMA strongly encourages the Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation to approve an evidence-based label when they meet on Friday,” Dr Bartone said.

To arrange interviews, contact Clare Ross 0429 291120:

- Label consumer testing: FARE CEO Caterina Giorgi
- Open Letter call to action: AMA President Dr Tony Bartone