



IRISH MEDICAL
ORGANISATION
Ceardchumann Dochtúirí na hÉireann

Submission to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health and Children on
Alcohol Marketing

November 2011

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Alcohol is associated with more than 60 acute and chronic health disorders ranging from accidents and assaults to mental health problems, cardiovascular disease, liver cirrhosis and certain cancers, including cancer of the upper aero-digestive tract, colorectum and breast. Chronic conditions more often affect older people while acute conditions are more prevalent amongst younger people.ⁱ

In a study of attendance at accident and emergency departments 2003-2004, 28% of injuries were related to alcohol consumption, of which, almost half (45%) were in the 18-29 year old age-group.ⁱⁱ 61% of those presenting with alcohol related injuries had consumed 12 or more drinks.ⁱⁱⁱ

Alcohol is considered to be a contributory factor in accidental death and suicide. Recent research found that 36.5% of road fatalities are alcohol-related with highest rates among 19-34 year olds^{iv} and 56% of suicides tested positive for alcohol, rising to 93% of suicides under 30 years of age.^v

Alcohol is also related to unsafe sex, drunkenness, public disorder and interpersonal problems.

Consuming alcohol during pregnancy increases the risk of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder yet 63% of women report drinking alcohol during pregnancy with 7% drinking 6 or more units per week.^{vi}

Ireland ranks among the highest consumers of alcohol in Europe.

- Alcohol consumption per adult (15 years and over) rose from 9.8 litres of pure alcohol in 1987 to 13.3 litres in 2006, peaking at 14.3 litres in 2001.^{vii}
- 28% of people reported binge drinking (consuming 6 or more standard alcoholic drinks on one occasion) at least once a week.^{viii}
- 53% of children (10 to 17 years old) report ever having had an alcoholic drink and among 15 to 17 year olds, over a third report being drunk in the last month.^{ix}

In Ireland the drinks industry spends approximately €50m on advertising^x and are the major sponsors of festivals and sporting events.^{xi} Young people are particularly susceptible to alcohol promotion. Mass media advertising, sports and events sponsorship, merchandising, internet presence, electronic communications and point-of-sale marketing, "all combine to embed the young-person in a network of pro-drinking stimuli".^{xii} The IMO have been warning against the dangers of alcohol since the 1980's and has clear policy on the promotion of alcohol particularly to young people.

IMO Recommendations

Alcohol Strategy

- Publish Ireland's combined alcohol and illicit drug strategy without delay.

Health Warnings and Labelling

- Introduce explicit government health warnings on alcoholic beverages including warnings on the dangers of drink-driving;
- introduce gram of alcohol and calorie content labeling on all alcohol beverage containers;
- legislate for mandatory health warning labeling of alcohol products in respect of pregnancy and Foetal Alcohol Syndrome and Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

Alcohol Promotion

- prohibit below cost selling of alcohol;
- introduce a minimum pricing structure for alcohol products including products sold for consumption off the premises in which it is purchased;
- work with Northern Ireland to introduce the minimum price structure for alcohol products on an all island basis;
- bring in a sliding scale of alcohol taxes with the lowest tax on low alcohol beer and the highest tax on spirits;
- place 'polluter pays' levy on tobacco and alcohol manufacturers in order to make a contribution to the healthcare costs relating to the use of these substances;
- commence Section 9 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2008 (structural separation of licensed and non-licensed businesses on a premises);
- introduce and commence the regulations developed under Section 16 (1) (b) and Section 16 (1) (c) of the Intoxicating Liquor Act (regulations relating to the promotion and consumption of alcohol);
- ban the use of state or semi-state facilities, to promote or advertise alcohol;
- ban the use of HSE facilities, or the facilities of any agency funded by the HSE, to advertise alcohol;
- ban public sector employees from being used to promote alcohol on behalf of the alcohol company, when they are clearly identified as public sector workers.

Promotion of alcohol to Young People

- prohibit alcohol sponsorship of sporting activities and sporting organisations;
- ban the promotion or sponsorship of concerts by alcohol companies where the attendance will include people under 18 years of age;
- legislate so that a pre 9pm watershed ban on alcohol advertising on Irish television is brought in;
- abolish all advertisement for alcohol in cinemas other than when a film with an 18 plus cert is shown and at other events where under-18 year olds attend;
- introduce a traceability mechanism to be put in place so that alcohol sold in off-licences to underage persons can be traced.

References

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