What works – and why do governments continue to do what doesn’t work?

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Why should we worry about alcohol?

- Alcohol is good for us
- Systematic reviews of the evidence conclusively demonstrate that the net effect to society is detrimental
Why should we worry about alcohol?

• Alcohol is good for us

• Drinking is pretty harmless

In 2004, 4.6% of the global burden of disease and 3.8% of deaths around the world were attributable to alcohol (Rehm et al., 2009).... and then there’s the social cost....

Why should we worry about alcohol?

• Alcohol is good for us

• Drinking is pretty harmless

• It’s only teenagers that have a problem

Of the alcohol-attributable burden of disease worldwide:

• 33.6% is among people aged 15 to 29

• 31.3% people aged 30 to 44 years

• 22% people aged 45 to 59 years
Why should we worry about alcohol?

- Alcohol is good for us
- Drinking is pretty harmless
- It’s only teenagers that have a problem
- It’s no worse now than in the past

- Alcohol consumption declined steadily throughout the nineteenth century
- Consumption began to increase in the 1960s
- A doubling of consumption among 11 to 15 year olds between 1990 and 2006

What does the evidence tell us?

- Several comprehensive reviews of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of interventions to reduce alcohol-related harms
- The most effective strategies are:
  - Increasing the price and reducing the availability of alcohol;
  - Banning alcohol advertising;
  - Drink-driving interventions (such as random breath testing and low or zero blood alcohol concentration restrictions for inexperienced drivers); and
  - Individual interventions with at-risk drinkers

(Anderson et al 2009; Babor et al 2010)
So now we know what to do, let’s get on with it....

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- It appears, in the countries for which data is available, that the policies with the widest community support are those that the evidence suggests are ineffective.

- In Australia (AIHW 2008)
  - increasing the price of alcohol 🌡️ - 13% strongly support
  - reducing trading hours for pubs and clubs 🌡️ - 20% strongly support
  - increasing the legal drinking age 🌡️ - 26% strongly support
  - limiting alcohol advertising on television until after 9.30pm 🌡️ - 40% strongly support
• Survey of over 4000 people in four districts in Finland (Holmila et al 2009)
  – educating the young on dangers related to drinking ☑  88% fully support
  – providing information on alcohol related harms ☑  75% fully support
  – increasing the price of alcohol ☑  26% fully support
  – decreasing alcohol store hours ☑  21% fully support
  – banning alcohol advertising ☑  20% fully support

So, what is the role of social marketing?

“... while public information and education programs are largely ineffective in reducing harmful alcohol consumption [i.e., bringing about individual behaviour change], there is evidence that these programs (and thus, if done well, social marketing) can serve to raise public and political awareness of the need to address alcohol-related harm”

(Anderson et al 2009).
• The role of social marketing is to work consistently and cohesively to bring about the necessary changes in our communities to address the current, and increasing, levels of alcohol-related harm

• Requires a combination of:
  – customer-focused (downstream) social marketing
  – critical marketing, and
  – strategies to bring about environmental and policy change (upstream social marketing)

If, as social marketers, we are to make a contribution to addressing alcohol related harms in our communities, we need to:

  – move the conversation away from ‘problem’ drinkers (such as young people) and instead talk about our drinking cultures;
  – move away from ineffective (but popular) victim-blaming, high-fear social advertising campaigns;
  – shine an enquiring light on the tactics of commercial marketers.
  – shift the conversation – with the community and with governments – to the strategies that are effective