

Health warning labels on alcoholic beverages: opportunities for informed and healthier choices

Snapshot series on alcohol control policies and practice

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Brief at- a-glance

The problem

Although alcohol negatively affects various health outcomes, awareness about the health risks associated with consuming alcohol remains relatively low. WHO recommends labelling alcoholic beverages to increase awareness and ensure that consumers make informed decisions. Current labelling practices across countries are not standardized as they are with medicine, food products and soft drinks. The inconsistencies in displaying information and other factors such as the scale of interventions and assessment methods have resulted in divergent practices and outcomes, leaving consumers without critical information to make decisions.

The evidence

Although health warning labels are talked about as one policy approach to curb the consumption of alcohol, they can be implemented and evaluated in various ways that can affect whether they can be considered effective. For example, whether the labels have been designed to raise awareness about health risks or to change behaviour, the way the label is designed and formatted, the scale of the interventions and the time horizon over which

the effects are measured. While the literature on the impact of warning labels on behaviour is limited, experimental studies indicate that warning labels can have an impact on self-reported intention to reduce consumption. However, the effect of health warnings labels is optimized when reinforced by other policies that curb alcohol consumption.

The know-how

Experiences from different countries can help to inform future approaches. Six examples of how labelling can be effective highlight the significance of regional approaches to labelling and the importance of considering all aspects of labelling interventions, including size, text, colours and placement.

The next steps

Civil society, community-based organizations, researchers and research institutions should continue to protect consumer's rights and to evaluate the implementation of labelling policies in real-world settings while policy- and decision-makers should build approaches based on the best evidence related to design, messaging and implementation.



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Related resources

[Webinar recording](#) | [Event description](#) | [Programme](#)

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About the series

This Snapshot is part of a series of briefs tackling critical issues related to the determinants driving the acceptability, availability and affordability of alcohol consumption and how it affects people and their communities. The series aims to facilitate evidence and experience-informed conversations on key topics relevant to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the noncommunicable diseases targets in the context of the WHO Global Strategy for reducing the harmful use of alcohol and its global action plan. Each brief is the result of a global, multistakeholder conversation convened by the Less Alcohol Unit, part of the WHO Department of Health Promotion. The topics of the series emerged in response to blind spots in the current policy conversations. The approach and length of the Snapshots do not fully describe the complexities of each topic nor do the illustrative country experiences. The series is a conversation-starter rather than normative guidance. Relevant WHO resources are provided to explore the subject in more depth.

The series is intended for a wide audience, including professionals working in public health

and local and national alcohol policy focal points, policy-makers, government officials, researchers, civil society groups, consumer associations, the mass media and people new to alcohol research or practice.

What is a health promotion approach to reducing alcohol consumption?

Drinking has multidimensional connotations. Robust and growing evidence demonstrates that cultural, social and religious norms influence alcohol consumption – acceptability, ease of purchase (availability) and price (affordability). Addressing this multidimensional causality chain requires a portfolio of health promotion interventions to moderate the determinants driving alcohol consumption and, in turn, enable populations to increase control over and improve their health to realize their full potential.

How are the briefs developed?

The briefs result from a quick scanning of the recent evidence on the topic, insights from leading experts, consultation with selected

Determinants driving the consumption of alcohol

	Acceptability	Availability	Affordability
			
Public health objectives	Protect consumers	Promote healthier settings	Build resilient societies
	Raising awareness, e.g. labelling	Mediating licensing, e.g. outlet density and location, online sales	Increasing prices, excise taxes and moderating other fiscal measures, reducing and ending financial incentives and subsidies
Health promotion interventions	Banning or comprehensively restricting alcohol marketing, advertising, sponsorships and promotion	Promoting healthy settings and pro-health environment, e.g. schools, stadiums	Tackling unrecorded alcohol
	Addressing commercial determinants and conflict of interests		



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countries and discussions that took place during webinars convened to create a platform to match evidence, practice and policies. Each webinar, attended by more than 100 participants, took place over 1.5 hours in English, Russian and Spanish. Between 8 and 10 speakers were invited to participate in each webinar, engaging global experts, officials from governments, academia, civil society and other United Nations agencies. Participants also engaged in the webinar by posting questions, sharing experiences and resources. The snapshot has been reviewed by the respective speakers – the contributors to each brief – to confirm the completeness and accuracy of the synthesis prepared.

Interested in other topics?

Visit the *Less Alcohol* webpage for other briefs in this series and forthcoming webinars. During 2021, topics including alcohol consumption and socioeconomic inequalities, unrecorded



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