

Scientists call for ban on alcohol-industry sponsorship of sport

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The alcohol industry's sponsorship of sport should be banned and replaced with a dedicated alcohol tax modelled on those employed by some countries for tobacco, say scientists.

Writing in the latest issue of the international journal *Addiction*, the authors have called on governments to outlaw the practice, citing their highly publicised 2008 study that showed alcohol-industry sponsorship of elite and community sport was associated with hazardous drinking among sport participants.

Dr Kypros Kypri, from Newcastle University in Australia, and Dr Kerry O'Brien, from The University of Manchester in Britain, claim alcohol industry representatives and sports administrators in the UK and Australia were dismissive of the 2008 research findings despite their publication in a peer-reviewed scientific journal.

Both the Portman Group - a public relations body set up by the alcohol industry - and the European Sponsorship Association, whose members include leading alcohol producers, argued that there was no causal relationship between sponsorship and alcohol misuse, which the researchers suggest is reminiscent of arguments used by the tobacco industry's behaviour in the 1990s.

Dr Kypri said: "The latest moves by the major sporting codes in Australia to lobby against the regulation of alcohol sponsorship of sport show that these bodies remain in denial of alcohol-related problems in

their sports.

"In addition, it is clear that these organisations have enormous vested interests in continuing to receive alcohol money and government should be careful to act in the public interest rather than to cave in to the sports and Big Booze."

Co-author, Dr O'Brien added: "Sport administrators are sending mixed messages to participants and fans when, on the one hand, they embrace and peddle alcohol via their sport, while on the other they punish individual sport stars and fans when they display loutish behaviour while intoxicated."

In place of industry sponsorship, the researchers suggest in their *Addiction* editorial that governments use the proceeds of alcohol taxation to sponsor sports via independent bodies. They say an opportunity exists in the UK, where a minimum unit price for alcohol is being considered, to 'ring-fence' revenue from any tax-driven increase in unit price for funding of [sports](#) and healthy community activities. This would allow elite and community sport to receive a dependable funding stream while ending the unhealthy relationship between the alcohol industry and sport.

Dr O'Brien added: "Sport is not only being used by the alcohol industry to encourage drinking among sportspeople and fans, it is also the primary vehicle for alcohol-industry marketing to the general public.

"For example, reports from the US show that for the first six months of 2009 Anheuser-Busch, one of the worlds biggest alcohol producers, spent more than US\$194 million or around 80% of its US TV advertising budget on sport. That is a staggering amount and indicates the centrality of sport as a marketing tool for alcohol sales."

Calls for a complete ban on alcohol advertising and sponsorship were

also made in September by the British Medical Association following the release of 'Under the Influence', a report showing the significant impact that [alcohol](#) marketing has on drinking and associated harm.

Source: University of Manchester ([news](#) : [web](#))

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