

Last orders for warning-free booze in Australia

July 12 2011



A small label with a health warning is displayed on an alcohol bottle in Sydney, Australia, Tuesday, July 12, 2011. Australia's liquor industry has launched a voluntary program on Tuesday to label its products with health warnings. (AP Photo/Rick Rycroft)

Australia's major alcohol brands on Tuesday launched voluntary health warnings on their labels targeting children, pregnant women and excessive boozing in a country famed for its binge-drinking culture.

DrinkWise, an industry body representing 80 percent of Australia's big [alcohol](#) names by volume, said new labels would be phased in on beer,

wine and spirits carrying warnings on underage drinking and tipping during pregnancy.

"There will be no silver bullet, this won't change overnight. It might take 10 years, but our aim is to see a healthier drinking culture in Australia," said DrinkWise chair Trish Worth at the label launch.

The new labels are not mandated by the government and are being seen as a pre-emptive strike in the wake of a government crackdown on tobacco.

Under the bold plan, which has drawn the ire of international tobacco giants, all cigarettes will have to be sold in plain, drab packets with graphic health warnings and no logos.

The new alcohol warnings, featuring slogans such as "kids and alcohol don't mix" and "it is safest not to drink while pregnant", will be accompanied by point-of-sale information about the health risks of drinking, Worth said.

Health experts from bodies including the Cancer Council and the Australian Medical Association said the campaign did not go far enough.

"The trouble is these are drinks industry friendly warnings, they are soft warnings, they don't have any of the specific health information that does make a difference to people," Mike Daube, head of the Public Health Association of Australia, told ABC Radio.

Others saw the move as a step in the right direction for Australia. [Alcohol abuse](#) is estimated to cost the economy as much as Aus\$36 (US\$38) billion every year -- more than smoking.

"Australia has one of the highest rates of alcohol abuse in the world and

the problem is particularly acute among young men," said Michael Farrell from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre.

"It is important that the [health](#) risks of alcohol consumption are better communicated and that the general population understand that alcohol is no ordinary commodity."

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