

Alcohol industry health campaigns miss the mark by a longshot

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Alcohol industry social responsibility schemes strengthen their own commercial interests while failing to reduce harmful alcohol use, according to a new worldwide study led by the University of Connecticut.

The study, published in *The BMJ*, examined [industry](#) actions on [social responsibility](#) and found that almost all of them—97 percent—lacked scientific support, while [alcohol](#) producers benefited from brand exposure and the appearance of being able to manage risk and achieve strategic goals.

Far from confirming industry claims that they can "do good" with corporate campaigns, the findings suggest that the public health benefits are likely to be minimal. In fact, 11 percent of the industry actions had the potential for doing harm.

"The [corporate social responsibility](#) activities of alcohol producers conceal a clear conflict of interest in improving public health, as a truly effective approach to tackling alcohol harm will only hurt their bottom line," says lead author Professor Thomas Babor, head of the Department of Community Medicine and Health Care at UConn Health.

"Governments, however, have a clear duty to put public health first, and must do so without industry interference," Babor adds.

The researchers based their study on more than 3,500 efforts by the [alcohol industry](#) to reduce harmful alcohol use. Efforts were assessed based on benefits to the industry in terms of their potential for marketing, impact on regulatory policy, and strategy. And the [public health](#) impact of the efforts was assessed in terms of effectiveness and potential for harm.

"The alcohol industry is increasingly positioning itself as part of the solution in reducing harmful drinking," says Katherine Robaina, UConn researcher and study author. "This paper shows the alcohol industry's 'contributions' are not based on science, and, in fact, may be used as a form of stakeholder marketing around the globe."

In addition to a widespread lack of scientific rigor behind the actions, only a quarter conformed to the recommended World Health Organization (WHO) target areas for global action to reduce the harmful use of alcohol.

The industry's actions were found to have been conducted disproportionately in regions with high-income countries—Europe and North America—compared to nations such as Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

Researchers were not able to estimate the costs to the industry of the actions to determine whether they represented significant charitable contributions or were merely activities that, in some cases, they would have been required to conduct anyway.

More information: Thomas F Babor et al, Is the alcohol industry doing well by 'doing good'? Findings from a content analysis of the alcohol industry's actions to reduce harmful drinking, *BMJ Open* (2018). [DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2018-024325](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2018-024325)

Provided by University of Connecticut

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