

The alcohol industry needs more scrutiny

June 1 2011

The influence of "Big Alcohol" in the health arena deserves as much scrutiny as Big Pharma and Big Tobacco, especially in light of evidence of bias in funded research, unsupported claims of benefit, and inappropriate promotion and marketing by the alcohol industry, says a new editorial in this week's *PLoS Medicine*. The *PLoS Medicine* editors argue that the statistics about problem drinking are troubling enough, but what also demands more attention and research is the influence of the alcohol industry on health research, government policy, and public perceptions of the harms and benefits of alcohol.

In the UK, for example, there have been scathing allegations that the current government is too close to the drinks industry, including its recent invitations allowing industry representatives to influence [public health policy](#), which led to a withdrawal of support for a key [alcohol policy](#) by major organizations including the British Medical Association, Royal College of Physicians, and several alcohol control charities.

Other analyses have documented a laundry list of misdeeds by the alcohol industry: promoting the health benefits of alcohol while downplaying harms; deflecting attention away from scientific data that contradict industry exaggerations of benefit; evading government controls on advertising by evolving new strategies to market to youth; and engaging in philanthropy to promote [brand loyalty](#), among others.

"If this questionable behavior is reminiscent of the strategies developed by the pharmaceutical, tobacco, and other industries to further their agendas," say the editors, "it should be a wake-up call to us all."

They continue: "Whether the solutions are stricter regulation over advertising and promotion, banning sports sponsorships, setting minimum pricing, restricting access, introducing mandatory safety labeling, or holding the industry to account for the harms associated with their products, there is a need now to target more attention to and research on the [alcohol industry](#) that can support and fuel legislative, regulatory, and community action to protect the public health."

More information: The PLoS Medicine Editors (2011) Let's Be Straight Up about the Alcohol Industry. PLoS Med 8(5): e1001041. [doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1001041](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1001041)

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