

## COMMENTARY

## How the alcohol industry relies on harmful use of alcohol and works to protect its profits

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### Abstract

*The alcohol industry have attempted to position themselves as collaborators in alcohol policy making as a way of influencing policies away from a focus on the drivers of the harmful use of alcohol (marketing, over availability and affordability). Their framings of alcohol consumption and harms allow them to argue for ineffective measures, largely targeting heavier consumers, and against population wide measures as the latter will affect moderate drinkers. The goal of their public relations organisations is to ‘promote responsible drinking’. However, analysis of data collected in the International Alcohol Control study and used to estimate how much heavier drinking occasions contribute to the alcohol market in five different countries shows the alcohol industry’s reliance on the harmful use of alcohol. In higher income countries heavier drinking occasions make up approximately 50% of sales and in middle income countries it is closer to two-thirds. It is this reliance on the harmful use of alcohol which underpins the conflicting interests between the transnational alcohol corporations and public health and which militates against their involvement in the alcohol policy arena. [Casswell S, Callinan S, Chaiyasong S, Cuong PV, Kazantseva E, Bayandorj T, Huckle T, Parker K, Railton R, Wall M. How the alcohol industry relies on harmful use of alcohol and works to protect its profits. *Drug Alcohol Rev* 2016;35:661-664]*

**Key words:** alcohol policy, alcohol industry, harmful use alcohol.

In 1996 an internal paper from Philip Morris [1] (then producers of alcohol as well as tobacco products) laid out the urgent need to ensure that alcohol producers did not face the same situation the tobacco industry was facing (which resulted eventually in a Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, including Article 5.3 which ensures that governments must make decisions on tobacco policy free from the influence of tobacco corporations) [2]. While the tobacco industry has fought a rear-guard action, challenging the evidence on health

effects and obfuscating the message [3], the alcohol industry has taken a much more proactive approach to secure an all-important positioning as a potential collaborator in reducing alcohol related harm.

The World Health Organization (WHO) Global Strategy on Reducing the Harmful Use of Alcohol, endorsed in 2010 [4], was almost undermined by fierce contestation between Member States supporting the industry desire to be named as collaborators in future activities and those Member States (and supporting

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