



Curtin University

Alcohol Advertising and Aquatic Environments: Building the evidence for change



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Acknowledgement of Country

The WAVE research team would like to respectfully acknowledge the Whadjuk people of the Nyungar Nation who are the traditional custodians of the land where we live and work and acknowledge their vital connection to country. We pay our respects to their ancestors and Elders and senior knowledge holders past and present.

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The WAVE project has been a collaborative, community-driven effort, enriched by the invaluable contributions of everyone involved. Our team extends our heartfelt thanks to the service providers, policymakers, researchers, and community members who joined us in our shared commitment to fostering safer, more supportive aquatic environments for young people, free from the influence of the alcohol industry.

We would like to recognise the invaluable contributions of the following individuals who have been integral to the project.

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FOREWORD

'Being a part of the YPAG was an empowering experience, thanks to the WAVE team's commitment to making each of us feel valued and respected. They listened to our perspectives, integrating our insights to shape the project in a way that felt both inclusive and meaningful. Knowing that our voices were taken seriously in a project centred on young people was inspiring – it made me feel like I was able to make a difference for other young people like me.'

One of the most rewarding aspects was being able to suggest practical ideas, such as identifying the best places to collect data and providing feedback on the survey questions. As young people within the target group, we could provide insights on what would be realistic, ensuring the project would resonate with others like us. This experience not only allowed me to contribute meaningfully to the recommendations but also inspired me to stay involved in advisory groups and advocacy work. Seeing our ideas and feedback incorporated into the project made me appreciate the importance of young people's voices in driving real change in public health, particularly with issues directly affecting us.'

Emily Munro, YPAG member

'It has been an enriching and energising experience being a member of the Alcohol Project Team on the "Alcohol Advertising and Aquatic Environments: Building the Evidence for Change" project. Working closely with the Curtin team allowed me to re-ignite long-standing relationships in alcohol and drowning prevention, and it was exciting to be welcomed into the broader field of drowning prevention. This project broadened my perspective on addressing alcohol-related harms within the context of aquatic environments, and I am enthusiastic about the potential impact of this work.'

Engaging in interdisciplinary collaboration has strengthened my conviction that we can achieve far-reaching results by bridging alcohol policy and drowning prevention research. The opportunity to work alongside experts dedicated to reducing a variety of harms is both inspiring and motivating. I look forward to further contributing to this space, knowing that our collaborative efforts will drive meaningful change.'

Dr Tina Lam, Senior Research Fellow, Monash Addiction Research Centre

'While education is at the core of our efforts, the opportunity to listen and learn from the Alcohol Project Team & Research Collaborative was a wonderful opportunity. The insights into advertising around water, on social media and youth perspectives, represent a valuable evidence base to inform future actions. The central role of the young people's advisory group in this project is noteworthy. Well done to the WAVE Curtin team and volunteers for capturing their perspectives and ideas. (including how to make toast!)

Collaboration is a value of the team I lead at Royal Life Saving. Increasingly drowning prevention is multidisciplinary and this research, the opportunity to be involved in the workshop to analyse and inform recommendations for advocacy reinforces our commitment to working together and our collective goal of empowering the community to be safe in and around the water.'

Peter Leaversuch, CEO, Royal Life Saving Society WA

'As a drowning prevention researcher, I was keen to understand how the commercial determinants of health, specifically the alcohol industry, affects young people and the aquatic environment. Alcohol advertising is everywhere; young people are often bombarded by advertisements on billboards, at bus stops, and on social media. What we don't know, is how the industry uses clever tactics and tools to make drinking part and parcel of everyday life in and around our beaches, rivers and other waterways. What we do know is that investment by the alcohol industry far outweighs investment in health promotion. To meet this challenge, we wanted to build the small evidence base to inform advocacy efforts on a relatively underexplored issue that affects drowning prevention efforts in Western Australia and beyond.'

The WAVE project used a range of methods to collect data and we are excited to share these tools and our insights with our colleagues. One of our exciting outcomes is an interactive web map that shows where alcohol advertisements are located, which can help with future planning and efforts to reduce alcohol-related problems in these aquatic areas.'

We hope this work will make a difference and ultimately lead to the creation of an environment free from pervasive advertisements normalising alcohol consumption around our waterways. We hope this report will be useful for decision-makers, community groups, and advocates, helping them take important steps to limit the impact of the alcohol industry and improve water safety outcomes.'

Associate Professor Justine Leavy, Chief Investigator, Curtin University

Executive summary



Alcohol advertising is pervasive, with the industry in Australia investing over \$100 million annually to promote its products. Young people are regularly exposed to these advertisements in various places and spaces, including billboards, bus shelters, and social media platforms. This exposure contributes to an earlier introduction to alcohol consumption and an increased likelihood of participating in harmful drinking.

The **Water Alcohol adVertising Evidence (WAVE) Project** sought to add to the current small evidence base and advance advocacy efforts, informing policies, practices, and future research to address alcohol advertising and its impact on young people in aquatic environments. Funded by a Healthway Exploratory Research Grant, the project was based at Curtin University's School of Population Health in the Collaboration of Evidence for Research and Impact in Public Health (CERIPH).

What did we do?

This exploratory research aimed to quantify the presence and content of outdoor alcohol advertising in five coastal locations in Perth, Western Australia (WA) and alcohol advertising featuring aquatic activities and aquatic locations on the social media platform Instagram.

Additionally, the research explored young people's perceptions and behaviours surrounding alcohol advertising and consumption near water.

The project had six key components.



1. BUILDING THE TEAM

We prioritised conducting our research in collaboration with people and organisations that would benefit from, give insight to and be impacted by the project findings.

2. REVIEWING THE LITERATURE

To inform subsequent research phases, we reviewed the current peer-reviewed literature on young people's alcohol use in aquatic environments.



3. UNDERSTANDING THE ENVIRONMENT

We identified five aquatic precincts in and around Perth, WA and conducted an environmental and policy audit.

4. EXAMINING INSTA

We reviewed the Instagram accounts of five popular alcohol brands to examine how they marketed their products and how often they featured activities in or near water.



5. HEARING FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

A survey examined young people's knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours related to alcohol, alcohol advertising, sponsorship, and participation in aquatic activities.

6. MAKING SENSE OF FINDINGS

To interpret the study findings, we held sensemaking workshops with researchers, community researchers, and young people.





BUILDING THE TEAM

Our project governance structure included individuals from government, research, community, peer groups, and non-governmental agencies working with young people, as well as those involved in injury, drowning prevention, and alcohol and other drug initiatives.

Project governance was supported by the establishment of three groups:

- Alcohol Project Team, responsible for the ongoing activities of the project;
- Research Collaborative, who offered strategic advice and feedback throughout the project, assisting with instrument design, data collection, community relationships, data interpretation, and developing policy recommendations; and
- Young People Advisory Group (YPAG), who helped to ensure that the research was guided by and inclusive of young people's perspectives.



REVIEWING THE LITERATURE

The review guided the study's subsequent stages: the development of outdoor (alcohol) advertising codes; a content analysis coding framework; intercept interview guide; and formulation of recommendations.

The 24 included papers in the review revealed three key aspects of young people's alcohol use in recreational aquatic settings:

- Prevalence and risk factors;
- Epidemiology of alcohol-related unintentional drowning; and
- Interventions to reduce alcohol-related harm in these environments.

03



UNDERSTANDING THE ENVIRONMENT

Five aquatic precincts in Perth, WA, were identified as 'at risk' locations for alcohol-related water injuries by the state's leading drowning prevention agency.

- Identified precincts were Cottesloe, City Beach, Scarborough, Hillarys and Mandurah. Team members worked in pairs to visit each precinct, recording outdoor advertisements and their features.
- A coding system was used to analyse the data and create five maps showing the locations of the advertisements in relation to nearby licensed alcohol outlets.
- A policy audit was undertaken to determine relevant alcohol related policies for each local government area in which the precincts were located. From the audit findings, only Mandurah had policies specific to alcohol advertising and young people.

04



EXAMINING INSTA

We wanted to understand how brands use aquatic settings and activities in their social media content to promote alcohol, particularly to young people.

- The 20 most recent Instagram posts from five popular Australian brands – Gage Roads Brewing, Corona, Pirate Life Brewing, Somersby, and Smirnoff – were analysed.
- Posts were coded using a framework based on findings from the scoping review and other established methods. More than 170 images were analysed along with their captions.
- Around one in five advertisements featured aquatic environments; most frequently the beach.

05



HEARING FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

A cross-sectional survey examined young people's exposure to and perceptions of alcohol advertising, particularly in relation to aquatic locations and activities. The survey was informed by scoping review findings and previous content analysis and refined with input from the YPAG.

- More than 100 young people participated.
- Almost two thirds had consumed alcohol before participating in an aquatic activity.
- Most participants reported seeing alcohol advertisements frequently, primarily through digital media (TV and streaming services) and online (including social media).

06



MAKING SENSE OF FINDINGS

Together, we validated, organised, and analysed the data, while also identifying potential recommendations.

- With our end users, we co-produced six recommendations to increase the small evidence base and advance advocacy efforts.
- The recommendations proposed by participants were categorised into an agenda to guide future action.
- These actions called for policy, practice, and future research to address alcohol advertising and its impact on young people in aquatic environments.

What did we find?

The specific outcomes of the project were:

1. **A scoping review to explore the peer-reviewed literature on the use of alcohol by young people** (aged 15–34 years) in the context of aquatic environments. This has been acknowledged by the sector as an important contribution to the small evidence base.
2. **Quantifying the presence and content of alcohol advertising in five Perth (WA) coastal precincts** and mapped liquor outlets and licensed venue proximity in those locations. GIS-driven methods previously used for unhealthy outdoor advertising data collection were adapted and used for the first time in WA to capture and code alcohol advertising featuring aquatic locations and/or activities around the coastal locations, and led to some interesting observations around differences between precincts in the use and location of alcohol advertising.
3. **Increased understanding of young people's exposure to the content and presence of alcohol advertising** featuring aquatic activities and/or locations on Instagram.
4. **Identifying the types of alcohol advertising that young people recall being exposed to** and their perceptions of this advertising around water; and whether exposure to and perceptions of alcohol advertising were related to young people's use of alcohol around water.
5. **An audit of alcohol policy in five local government areas** that aligned with the five coastal precincts and the creation of a live web map of the aquatic alcogenic environment. This can be used by stakeholders for future planning and advocacy efforts.
6. **A set of recommendations** for policy, practice and research for future endeavours.

We found that alcohol advertising around coastal locations and/or featuring aquatic activities and/or waterways is common and contributes to an increasingly aquatic alcogenic environment. In the selected coastal locations, our findings highlighted where alcohol advertisements are placed and how close they are to alcohol outlets, licensed venues and waterways, and various approaches to alcohol advertising policy across the five local governments.

We found:

- Alcohol brands used highly stylised imagery to associate alcohol with fun, friendship, and water related activities.
- Social media content is marketed towards young people and promotes activities that may pose risks for alcohol-related drowning events.

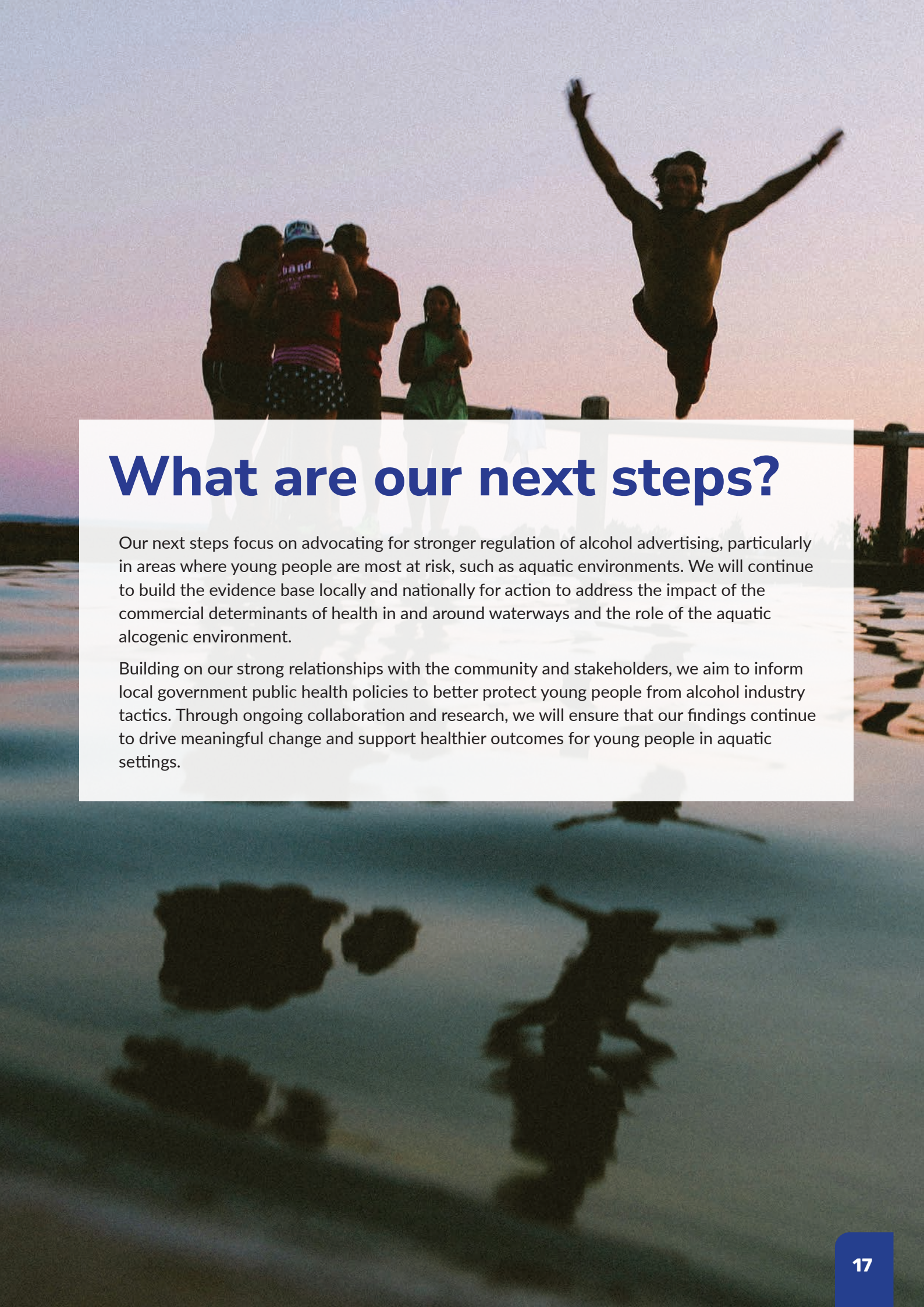
How are we sharing our research?

We prioritised knowledge translation from the outset of the project. Working together with those from policy, practice and research we sought to make our findings accessible and actionable for the broader community.

To keep participants and the broader sector informed throughout the project, we prioritised regular updates and aimed to disseminate our findings widely so they could be quickly put into use in 'real-time'. Our project website (www.deepwa.org/alcohol-advertising-around-water) supported this, which serves as a hub for sharing key findings, updates from the research team, and news from the broader drowning prevention sector, such as volunteer opportunities and upcoming events.

Beyond just sharing research findings, the project has created additional benefits, such as offering training and employment support to YPAG members, providing research opportunities for students, and expanding cross-sectoral expertise. It has also strengthened partnerships between tertiary institutions, not-for-profit organisations, and government, which will help us further share and disseminate our research.

The research team has developed six actionable recommendations that can be used to guide their efforts to expand the evidence base, advance advocacy efforts, and inform future policies and practices focused on addressing the impact of alcohol advertising on young people in aquatic environments.



What are our next steps?

Our next steps focus on advocating for stronger regulation of alcohol advertising, particularly in areas where young people are most at risk, such as aquatic environments. We will continue to build the evidence base locally and nationally for action to address the impact of the commercial determinants of health in and around waterways and the role of the aquatic alcogenic environment.

Building on our strong relationships with the community and stakeholders, we aim to inform local government public health policies to better protect young people from alcohol industry tactics. Through ongoing collaboration and research, we will ensure that our findings continue to drive meaningful change and support healthier outcomes for young people in aquatic settings.

Introduction

Alcohol is commonly consumed by young people in Australia and is a highly social practice.¹⁻⁵ The harmful effects of alcohol use are far-reaching, with consequences for the individual, their family, friends, and community.^{6,7} Globally, alcohol use is the leading preventable contributor to the burden of disease and injury for young people.⁸ This alcohol attributable burden disproportionately affects young people.⁹

An 'alcogenic' environment has been identified as a major contributor to alcohol-related harm and normalising alcohol consumption among young people.¹⁰ The alcogenic environment is driven by the impact of the alcohol industry which employs a wide range of pervasive marketing tactics to ensure that drinking is seen as part of everyday life.¹¹ Over time, these tactics have not only normalised alcohol consumption but also helped create concentrated areas of licensed premises, events that have a primary focus on drinking, intense advertising and promotion by the alcohol industry.¹²

In Australia the alcohol industry exposes young people to over \$100m of advertising per year, generating a 600% return on investment.² Alcohol brands use traditional and social media via direct (obvious) and indirect (subtle) techniques^{13,14} in a range of venues and formats. Their strategies range from sponsored paid advertisements; brand promoting digital and social media; outdoor advertisements; product placements within television shows, films and song lyrics; in-store and price promotions; branded merchandise; celebrity endorsements; influencers and user-generated content; apps; and sporting and musical event sponsorship.^{2,15,16}

While public health has increasingly turned its attention to the commercial determinants of health (the ways in which businesses and industries can shape and influence the health and well-being of populations), discussion of the alcohol industry within drowning prevention has been limited.³ Yet, alcohol remains a significant risk factor for drowning. Many social activities occur around aquatic environments, and alcohol use in and around water is a risk factor for injuries, including fatal and non-fatal drowning.^{1,17} Contributing factors including the extensive Australian coastline, the popularity of aquatic activities^{1,18} and associated risk practices¹⁷ means young people are over-represented in water-related injury statistics and drowning deaths.¹⁹⁻²²

The use of alcohol in aquatic environments immediately puts the alcohol industry into the spotlight, together with the emergence of an aquatic 'alcogenic' environment. This term refers to the widespread practice of consuming and promoting alcohol in and around waterways, where alcohol use becomes normalised through various factors such as advertising, social influences, and peer behaviours.¹ Recent research emphasises the need for greater advocacy and policy initiatives to address the impact of the alcohol industry, and to reduce the pervasive nature of alcohol advertising and the increase in aquatic alcogenic environments targeted at young people.

A vibrant, sunny outdoor scene featuring two women celebrating by a swimming pool. The woman on the left, with long brown hair and sunglasses, holds a glass of champagne. The woman on the right, with a large afro and yellow sunglasses, is laughing and holding a bottle of champagne. In the foreground, a silver bucket filled with ice and champagne sits on a stone ledge. The background shows a clear blue pool and lush green foliage under bright sunlight.

Research overview

Aim

This exploratory research aimed to quantify the presence and content of outdoor alcohol advertising in five coastal locations in Perth, Western Australia (WA) and alcohol advertising featuring aquatic activities and aquatic locations on Instagram. Additionally, the research explored young people's perceptions and behaviours related to advertising and alcohol consumption near water.

The research objectives were to:

1. Describe the volume and content of outdoor alcohol advertising in defined aquatic locations in Perth, WA.
2. Map and measure liquor outlet and licenced venue density and proximity in defined aquatic locations in Perth, WA.
3. Explore exposure to and perceptions of alcohol advertising in aquatic locations amongst young people in Perth, WA.
4. Identify the extent and nature of alcohol advertising featuring aquatic locations and/or activities on social media sites.
5. Identify current alcohol policy of local government authorities in defined aquatic locations in Perth, WA.
6. Co-design recommendations for policy, practice and advocacy.

Approach

The project used mixed methods across six phases:



Research components





Building the research team

Building a research team that was composed of multiple perspectives was critical to ensure that our research aligned with the community values, needs and goals. Strong community involvement was vital because, in our view, when research involves community members, we are accountable to our end users, ensuring that our outcomes are fit for purpose.



The project incorporated a project governance model that involved members from the target group, along with representatives from service providers, research and policy work. Project governance comprised individuals from government, research, community, peers, and non-government agencies working with young people and injury, drowning prevention, and/or alcohol and other drugs. In doing so, we envisioned this would add value to and deepen our understanding of the context, helping to shape project outcomes that are practical and impactful for end-users.

The research team comprised three groups:

1. Alcohol Project Team (APT)

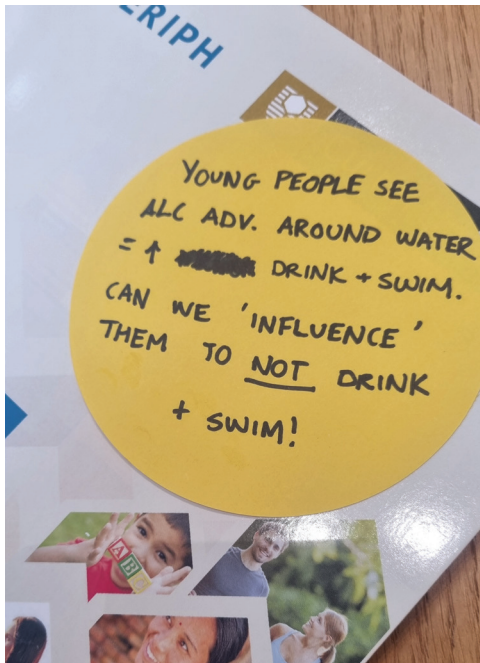
This team coordinated the meetings and collaboration between all the components of the governance model. The team was composed of a project officer and nine Chief Investigators.

2. Research Collaborative (RC)

Comprising representatives from key non-government and government organisations, this group provided strategic advice to the APT. Their role included contributing to instrument design, data collection methods, community relationships, and policy-ready recommendations.

3. Young People Advisory Group (YPAG)

Five young people from diverse backgrounds were engaged to ensure the research reflected the target group's perspectives. YPAG members were reimbursed for their time, received advocacy training, and assisted with participant recruitment, data collection, interpretation, and recommendation development.



Making sense of the findings
- implications for practice, policy
and research



The Research Collective
coming together for the
sensemaking workshop





Reviewing the literature

A review was conducted to explore the peer-reviewed literature on the use of alcohol by young people in aquatic environments, helping guide the development of outdoor alcohol advertising codes, a content analysis framework, and an interview guide for further recommendations. The review followed a recognised methodology and a structured process to identify relevant studies, chart data, and summarise results.

The search identified 842 initial articles; 24 articles were included in the final review.

The review addressed three aspects of young people's alcohol use in recreational aquatic environments:

- prevalence and risk factors;
- epidemiology of alcohol-related unintentional drowning; and
- interventions to reduce alcohol-related harm in aquatic environments.

Three broad themes emerged from the review:

1. Prevalence and risk factors

Alcohol use around water was common among young people, especially males, on **public holidays**, and in **regional areas**. It was linked with other behaviours like unsupervised or solo swimming. Risk perception varied; those who recognised the dangers were less likely to swim after drinking.



Public holidays



Regional areas



River drownings



Males

2. Epidemiology of alcohol-related drowning

The involvement of alcohol in drownings ranged from 8% in Australian coastal drownings to 72% in Finland. Alcohol involvement was more common in **river drownings** and was higher in **males**.

3. Interventions

Few interventions were identified. Three studies focused on **education** and **communication** strategies to reduce alcohol-related harm. They highlighted the importance of continued messaging and aligning campaigns with the target audience's perspectives.



Education



Communication

Findings highlight that:

Young people, particularly males, commonly use alcohol in and around water.

The risk of unintentional drowning increases with alcohol use.



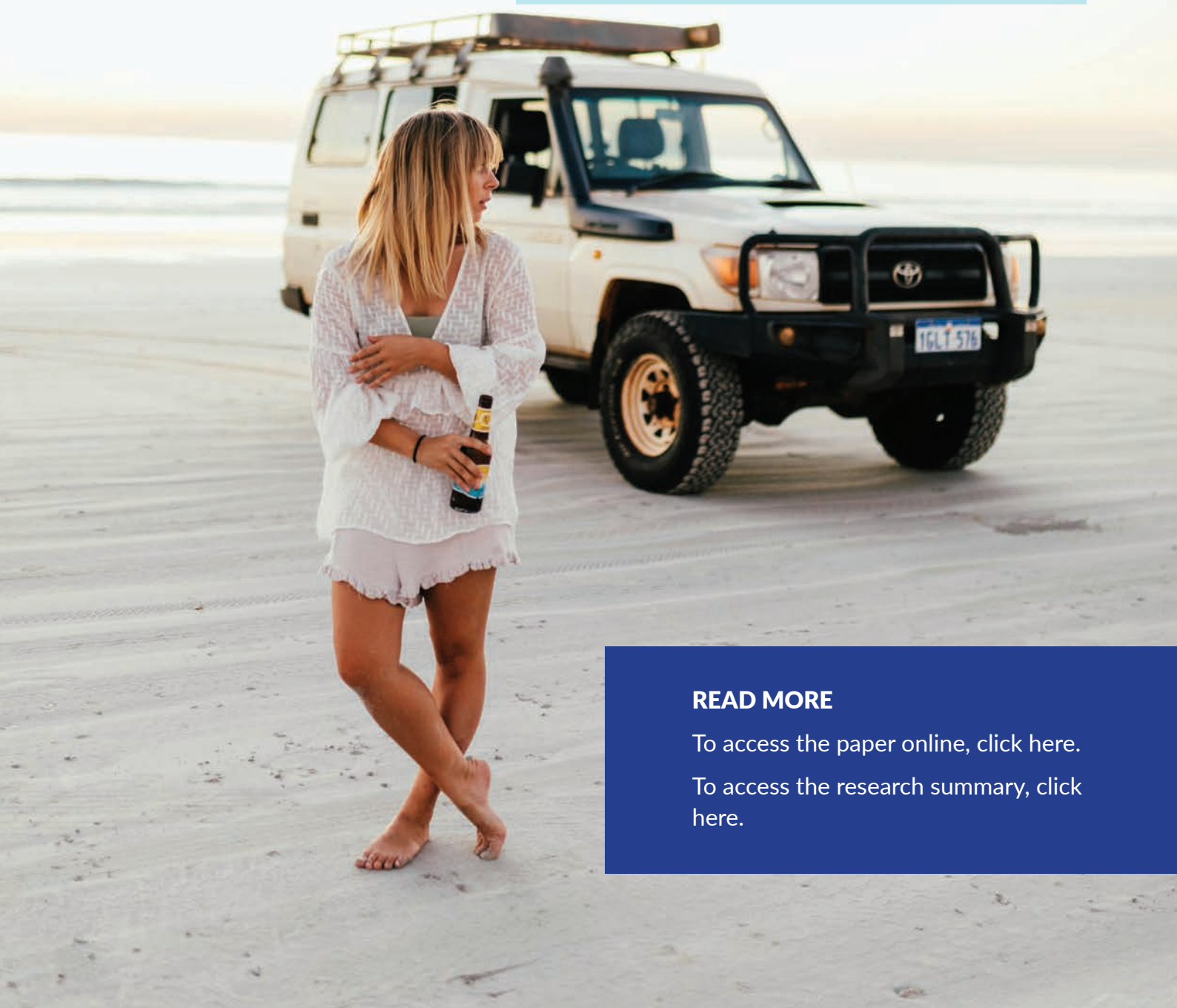
Many young adults were aware of the risks associated with alcohol use around water, but this awareness did not always result in less risky behaviour.

There are many influences on young adults' alcohol use around water, including risk perception, the surrounding context and peer influence.

Interventions to reduce alcohol-related harm around water among young people need to be comprehensive and consider environmental influences and supports to minimise the effect of the aquatic alcogenic environment.

Very few studies addressed interventions to reduce alcohol use around water, suggesting that many prevention campaigns have not undergone any formal evaluation. There is a need for further evaluation of existing prevention campaigns to inform future intervention strategies. While many studies addressed the prevalence of, and risk factors for alcohol use around water, no studies investigated the wider cultural and commercial determinants of this behaviour.

The review provides insights for addressing the complex social, environmental, and increasingly commercial factors that contribute to the aquatic alcogenic environments experienced by young people.



READ MORE

To access the paper online, [click here](#).

To access the research summary, [click here](#).





Understanding the environment

Through mapping, geospatial analysis and environmental audits, we aimed to develop and share a better 'picture' of alcohol advertising's density, presence, and visibility within young people's aquatic environments.

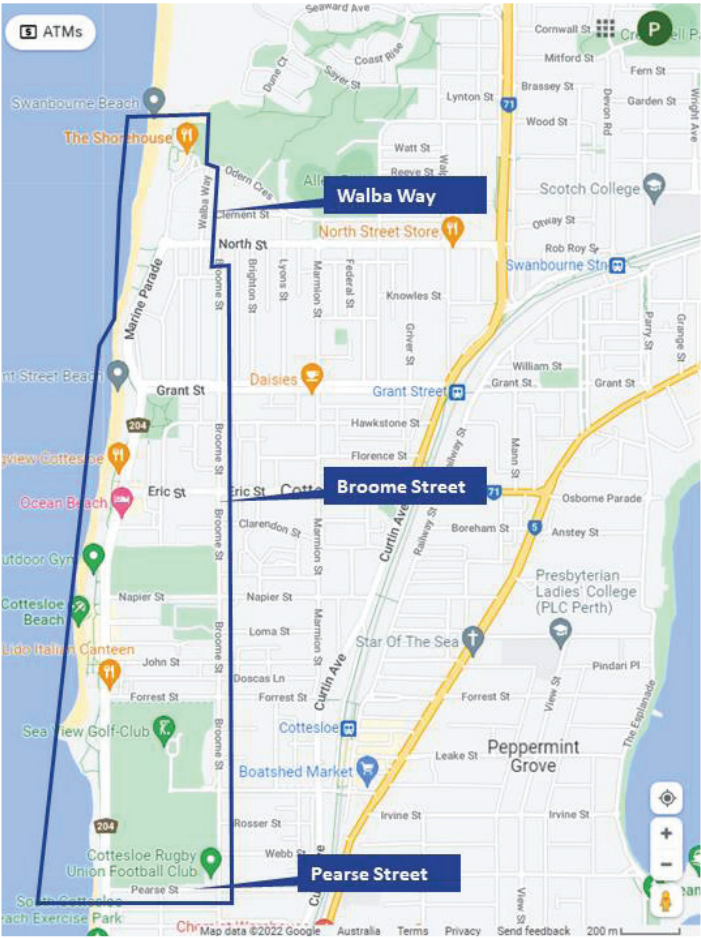
We identified five aquatic precincts in Perth, WA, deemed 'high risk' for alcohol-related water injuries by the state's leading drowning prevention agency.

The five precincts were:

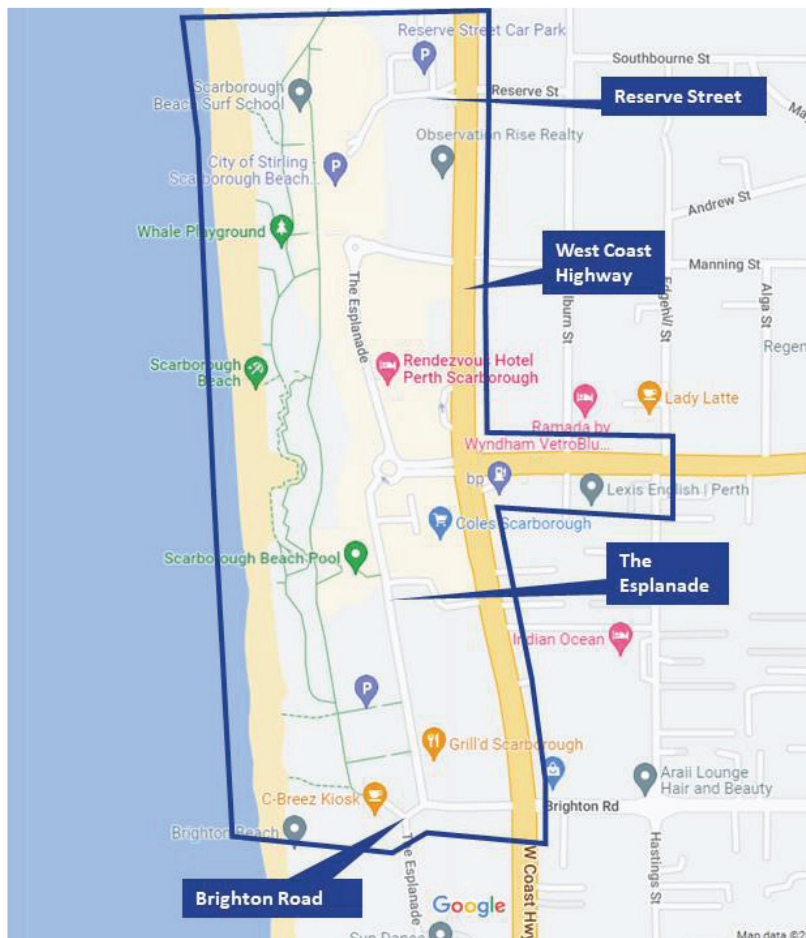
1. Cottesloe (Town of Cottesloe)
2. City Beach (Town of Cambridge)
3. Scarborough (City of Stirling)
4. Hillarys (City of Joondalup)
5. Mandurah (City of Mandurah)

Aquatic precincts in Perth, WA, deemed ‘high risk’ for alcohol-related water injuries

1. Cottesloe (Town of Cottesloe)

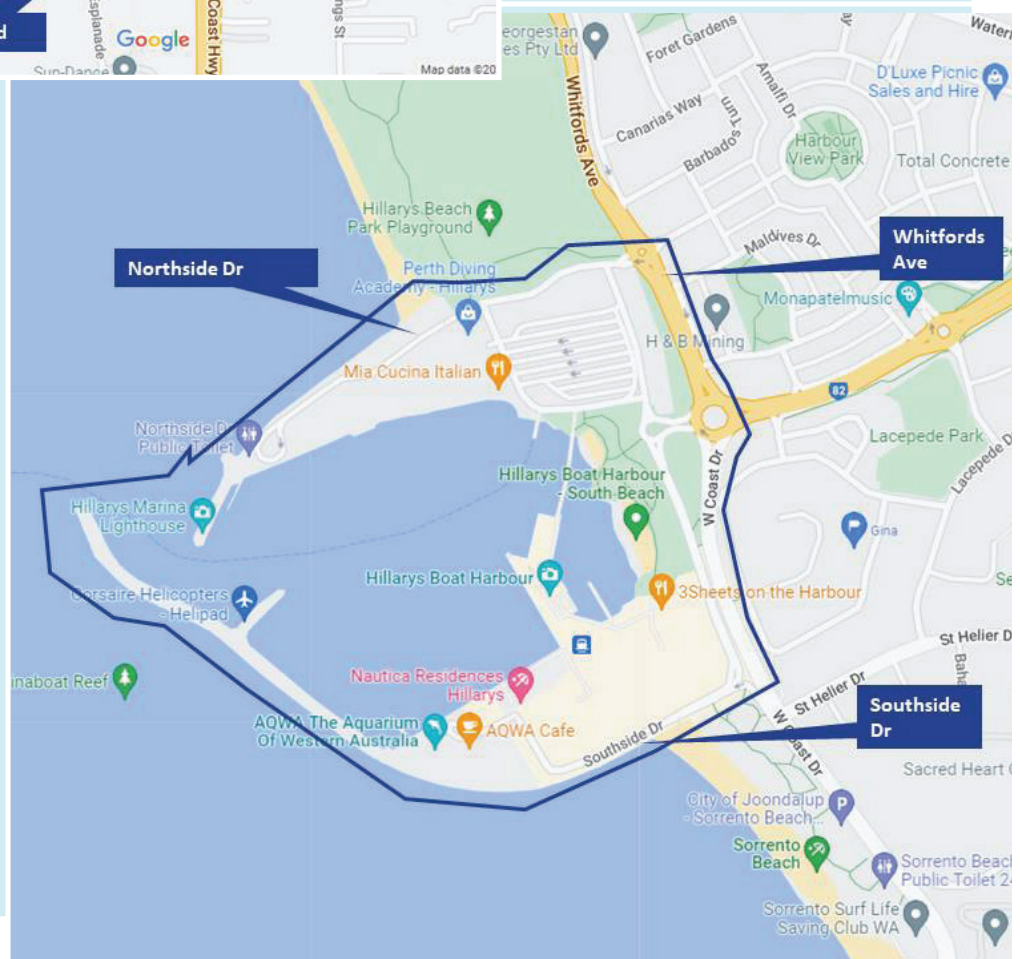


2. City Beach (Town of Cambridge)



3. Scarborough (City of Stirling)

4. Hillarys (City of Joondalup)

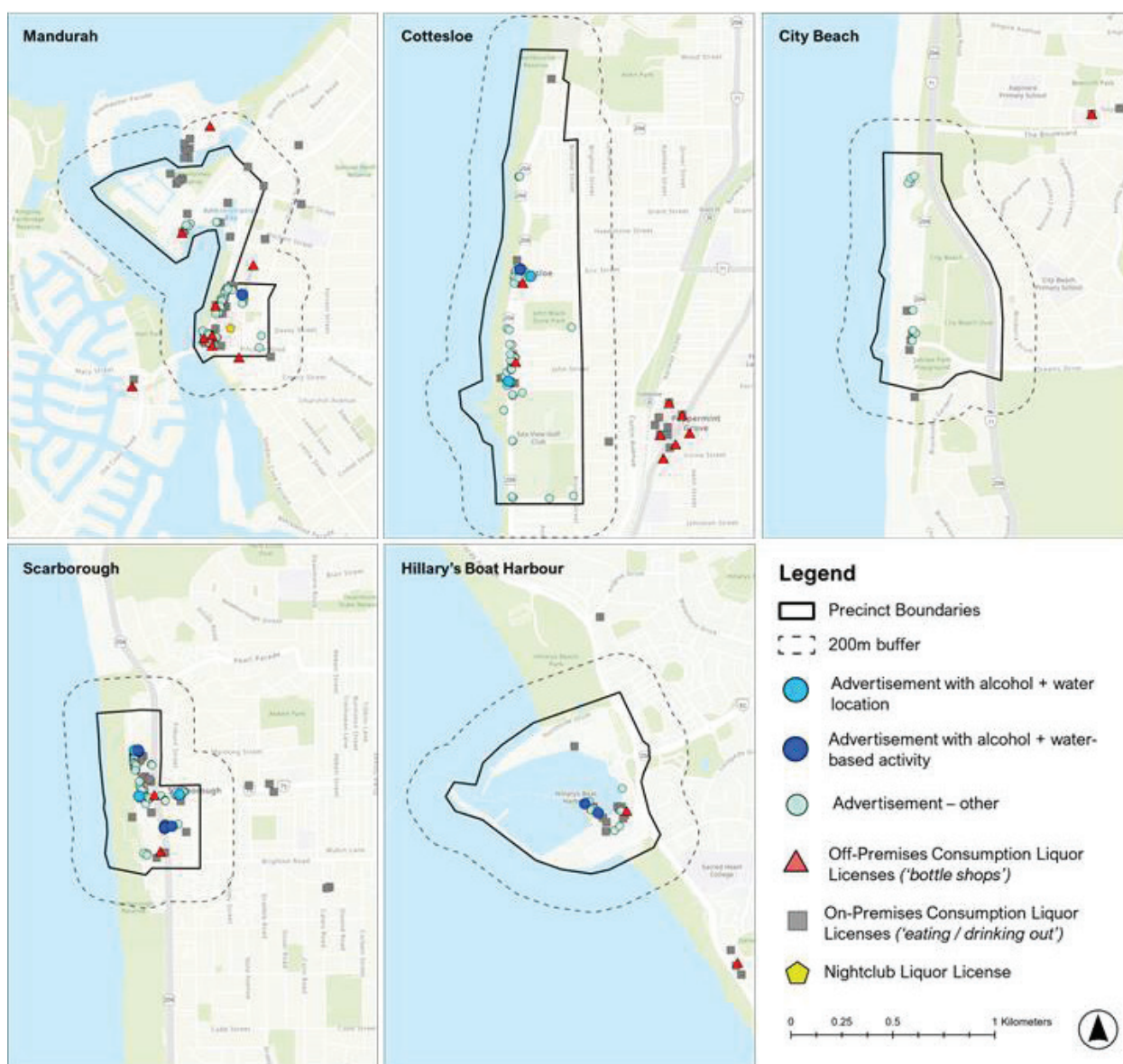




5. Mandurah (City of Mandurah)



We conducted environmental audits to document the volume and content of outdoor alcohol advertising within each of the five aquatic precincts. Team members used a customised tablet to identify, photograph, code and record the geolocation of each outdoor alcohol advertisement within each of the five areas.



Alcohol advertisements and outlet overlay

A desktop audit of local government *public health policy* was undertaken for all five local government areas, focusing on unhealthy food, smoking/vaping, the built environment, community safety, physical activity, and alcohol. Only one local government area acknowledged drowning prevention within their Youth Alcohol Strategy.

An interactive web map was created, the WAVE Project Web Map: Aquatic Alcogenic Environment. The map geocodes alcohol outlets (both on- and off-license) and maps advertisements within the five areas, overlaid with local waterways, natural ponds, water parks, and playgrounds. The maps illustrate the relationship between local government areas, aquatic sites, advertising featuring alcohol and nearby alcohol outlets, marking the first live web map to visualise these connections. The interactive map is hosted on the WAVE website to guide future practices and policy making.

READ MORE

To access the research summary, [click here](#).

To access the WAVE Project Web Map, [click here](#).





Examining Insta

We captured and analysed the 20 most recent Instagram posts from five popular alcohol brands to examine the marketing strategies used and the extent to which aquatic settings, such as the beach and ocean and activities such as surfing and boating were featured. Two team members used a coding framework to code 176 images from these posts.

Key findings included:

1. Aquatic environments – One in five images featured aquatic settings, with the beach and ocean common. Brand-specific differences were notable: 70% of Corona images prominently featured beach settings.
2. Aquatic activities – Almost one in five images included aquatic activities, such as surfing. One in four Gage Roads images showed surfing and around one-third of Corona images showing people relaxing at the beach.

We found alcohol marketing on Instagram is directed towards young people and may encourage behaviours that could increase the risk of alcohol-related drowning.

Many images tap into aspirational lifestyle content and seem designed to appeal to young people. Emphasising the social nature of drinking, Corona posts highlighted 'mateship', whilst Smirnoff posts showed alcohol was associated with 'happiness and fun'. One in four posts featured individuals who appeared under 25 years old (despite advertising regulations), which was common for Smirnoff posts where just over half featured young people.

Instagram provides alcohol companies with inexpensive and easy-access ways to promote alcohol to young people. Alcohol brands used images of fun and friendship circles with aquatic locations and activities as the backdrop. This type of advertising may contribute to risky behaviour, which increases the potential for alcohol-related water injury.

READ MORE

To access the research summary, [click here](#).









Hearing from young people

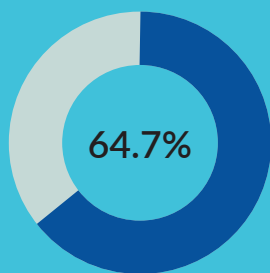
We explored young people's knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours related to alcohol, alcohol advertising, sponsorship, and their participation in aquatic activities, with a focus on how they interpret their exposure to alcohol advertising. Using insights from prior research, an intercept survey was piloted and refined based on feedback from the YPAG.

The survey targeted a convenience sample of young people aged 18–25 attending a free coastal event, collecting 102 responses over four weeks. Nearly half reported participating in aquatic activities often, and more than half had consumed alcohol while engaging in aquatic activities in the past year (referred to as “drinking and swimming”). Younger participants, males, and those with lower levels of education were more likely to engage in drinking and swimming.

Alcohol advertising

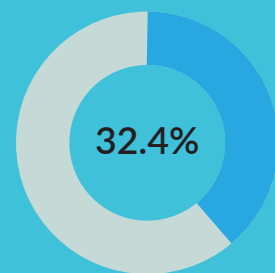
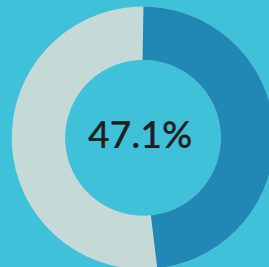
was commonly seen by participants, primarily on digital platforms like TV, streaming services, and social media. While fewer participants recalled seeing alcohol advertisements in aquatic settings, many agreed that alcohol advertisements suggested social benefits, such as feeling more social, relaxed, or confident.

Engagement with alcohol brands on social media was widespread:



Two-thirds had viewed alcohol-sponsored events

Almost half had liked alcohol-related posts



Around one-third had clicked links to alcohol websites

Analysis showed that those who interacted more with alcohol brands online or recalled seeing more alcohol advertisements were significantly more likely to engage in drinking and swimming.

The study highlights the influence of alcohol marketing

on young people's behaviour around water, especially in connection with social media engagement and alcohol consumption in aquatic settings.



Intercept volunteers in the field at Scarborough Beach Sunset Markets







Making sense of findings

The Alcohol Project Team hosted two collaborative workshops to help interpret project results, provide a collective opportunity to make sense of the findings and guide the design of the recommendations.

Sensemaking workshop 1: Narratives from young people

In the first workshop with the YPAG, project findings were shared, and through group discussions and activities, young participants had the chance to engage with the data, provide feedback on findings, and suggest recommendations.

Interested in their insights to further inform the project recommendations, YPAG members hand drew 'rich pictures' designed to stimulate and record insights through visual representation. Rich pictures can often lead to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of situations.²³ The images below have been created as composites of the content provided by young people in the YPAG through their hand-drawn images.

Legend

Image 1 Highlights the role of using social media tools to create a dialogue between peers and friends with a focus on prevention and advocacy efforts.

Image 2 Queries how local young people can impact a global issue when alcohol advertising is everywhere and how social media might be leveraged for 'good'.

Image 3 Reflects the way that past behaviours and practices can cause harm and suggests the need to bridge barriers and find solutions by harnessing social media to reduce the wave of alcohol advertising.



The young people's experiences were clustered into four themes:

Personal Advocacy and Skill Development

"Personal journeys and experience build confidence to participate in advocacy, but it takes time."

"There are barriers for me as a young person to being an advocate including 'imposter syndrome' and a lack of confidence in my own advocacy skills."

Use of Tools and Strategies for Advocacy

"I use tools I am familiar with like Insta, to influence my peers and to advocate for all sorts of things."

"I wonder whether television commercials are a credible and trustworthy source for young people."

Challenges in Youth Advocacy

"How can young people really combat Australia's alcogenic culture?"

"For me there is a real tension between local and global advocacy, how would what I do at the local level make any impact?"

Social Dynamics and Sustainability in Advocacy

"I think some groups of young people are easier to infiltrate due to their internally supportive bonds and strong social connection."

"There is a need for consistency and sustainability in projects and programs."

Sensemaking workshop 2: Insights from the sector

The second workshop held with the Research Collaborative shared a similar purpose to the first workshop but focused on perspectives from professionals working for and with the target group. This workshop allowed for knowledge exchange, dissemination, and synthesis to support the translation of findings. It fostered a rich and meaningful exchange between the Alcohol Project Team, target group representatives and potential end-users, helping shape future practical research outcomes.

The Research Collaborative provided insights and future implications that helped guide the development of the actionable agenda, and underpinned the recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.

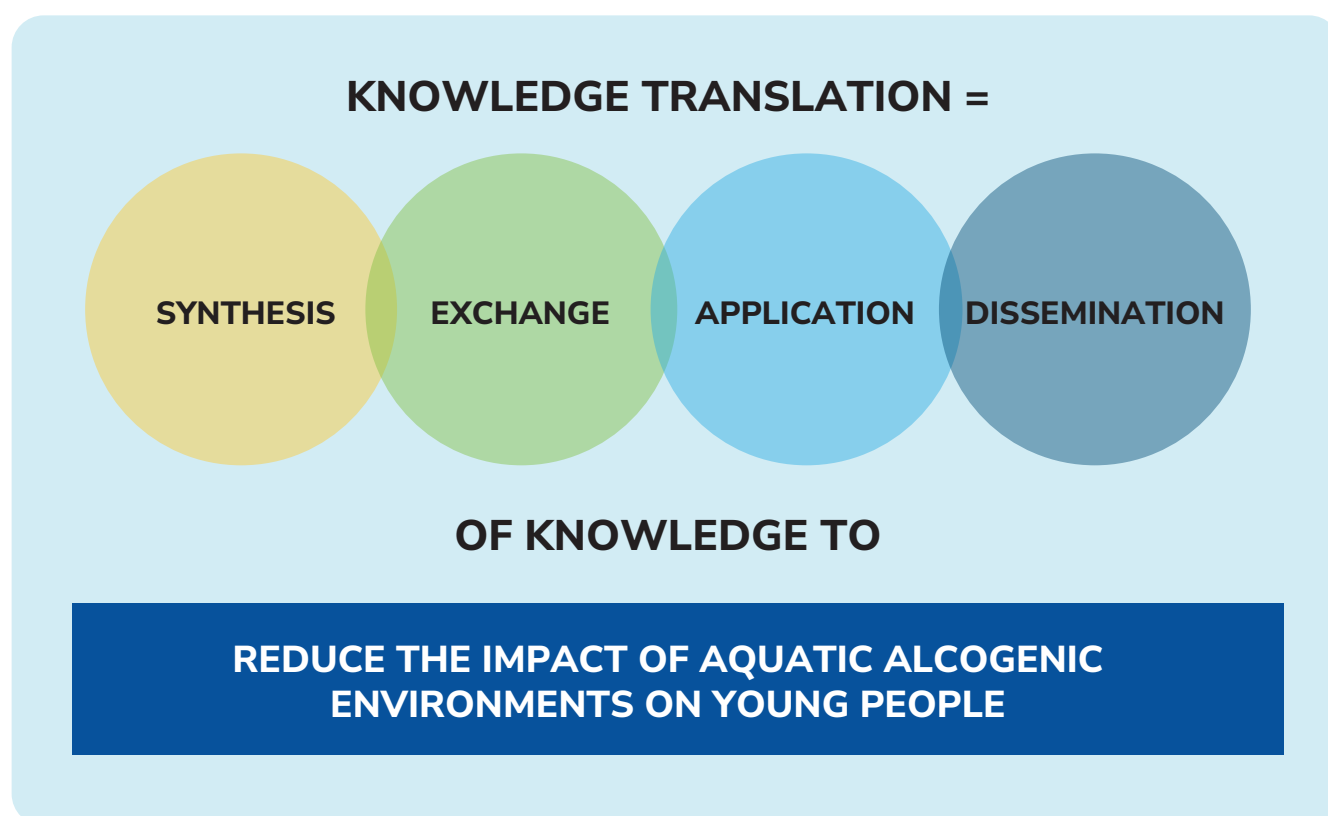
Key insights provided by the Research Collaborative toward project findings

Project phase findings	Key insights and future implications
Mapping, GIS analysis & environmental audit	● Timing: Explore advertising during certain times (e.g., holidays or in relation to specific events) and whether public health messages are implemented during these periods. ● Location: Examine how location influences the research question, specifically how coastal, river, regional, or metropolitan areas impact the advertising execution (type & quantity). ● Regulation: Comprehensively examine the Australian Beverages Advertising Code guidelines and their relevance to issues such as 'drinking and swimming'; specifically guidelines to address aspects related to drowning, water safety, and young people.
Content analysis	● Seasonality: Interrogate social media activity using time series analysis. Analysis of posts between and within seasons would be worthwhile. ● Corporate social responsibility: 'Water washing' refers to sophisticated marketing tactics that involve misleading or confusing consumers about the true nature of an activity to market a product or brand. It captures strategies designed to create a positive perception while obscuring or downplaying negative aspects. An in-depth investigation into water washing is worthwhile to examine how these techniques can exploit young consumers' trust and contribute to misinformation, raising concerns about the ethics of marketing and the need for stricter regulations to protect the young public's interest. ● Corporate posts vs social media feeds: The distinction between posts on alcohol company pages and sponsored alcohol advertisements in social media feeds needs to be analysed further to allow a more granular examination of broad marketing tactics used by the alcohol industry.
Intercept survey	● See, drink, swim: The significant association between exposure to alcohol advertising and engaging in 'drinking and swimming' has advocacy and policy implications. ● Can you tell us more: Increase the sample size and specific items to examine the relationship between time spent at the beach or engaging in aquatic activities and media exposure. Although the project's statistical analysis did not reveal any significant association, it was posited as a significant consideration that needed further investigation. ● Desensitisation to alcohol advertising: The contrast between the study's findings and personal experiences on social media (i.e., did not recall seeing aquatic locations or activities associated with alcohol). A question for further exploration emerged, specifically, is the alcohol industry using more subtle tactics to expose young people to alcohol advertising near water that they don't recognise as subconscious messaging? Worthy of further exploration.



Research impact

Knowledge translation can improve community impact by shaping research to meet the needs of decision-makers and end users. Essentially, it is about finding, creating, sharing and using knowledge. Our research followed established knowledge translation practices to shorten the research-to-practice pipeline and support evidence-informed decision-making, applying four key principles outlined by the Healthway Knowledge Translation Guide²⁴ and the Canadian Institute of Health Research Knowledge Translation Framework²⁵, outlined below.



The CERIPH SEAD Knowledge Translation Model

Synthesis – contextualising and integrating findings within the wider knowledge base

This research has produced tangible recommendations for policy and practice through the co-design workshops.

We noted a clear gap in the evidence base and policy directions regarding alcohol advertising as it relates to aquatic environments in WA. We anticipate research outcomes will feed into a range of strategic plans, e.g., RLSSWA 2025-2030 Strategic Plan and the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 (alcohol and risk-taking sections, pages 42-46). The findings from the research will also be used to advocate for specific regulatory and policy changes at the local, state and national government level.

Findings will be translated through the following synthesis strategies:

1. Previously established research methods supported by other Healthway and Cancer Council WA projects exploring unhealthy foods were incorporated into the present study. The use of the knowledge-to-action process²⁵ assisted in creating robust methods and protocols for fieldwork and data collection.
2. Knowledge generated (e.g., GIS mapping and content analysis) was made available to stakeholders throughout the project, ensuring timeliness and relevance of findings.
3. A scoping review synthesised peer-reviewed literature to inform this project and will be used to inform programs and policy.



Exchange – mutual learning resulting from the interaction between knowledge users and researchers

The Alcohol Project Team, Research Collaborative and YPAG brought together young people, non-government organisations, advocates, policymakers, researchers and the community to make sense of findings in the current socio-political context and develop meaningful recommendations for future research and practice.

Our governance model ensured the real-time exchange of information, drawing attention to contextual issues, identifying key leverage and pressure points in the policy, practice and community landscape, and supporting partners to use findings as they are discovered.

While some relationships were pre-existing and served to reinforce areas of common interest and future collaboration,

we also built new relationships and knowledge across drowning prevention, young people and alcohol and other drugs. The project has strengthened relationships between the research team and the community sector (e.g., with Injury Matters, Western Australian Local Government Association) and with other research groups located within the not-for-profit sector (e.g., Royal Life Saving Society, Life Saving Victoria). In addition, academic detailing has enabled RLSSWA and Injury Matters to showcase the practice-research nexus to undergraduate and postgraduate students using a case study.

Application – the iterative process by which knowledge is put into practice

The project was able to develop further capabilities of YPAG members. They were exposed to a range of research activities, building confidence to: provide feedback on the appropriateness of research materials; give advice regarding recruitment and interpretation of data; and participate in sensemaking workshops and contribute to developing recommendations. Two of the five YPAG members used their participation and networking to subsequently apply for other roles on community advisory boards.

1. Findings will be made available to all stakeholders and end users to inform program design, public health plans and advocacy strategies regarding alcohol harm reduction and injury prevention particularly those in aquatic environments.
2. Findings and outcomes will be used to tailor health promotion policy and environmental strategies by RLSSWA, Injury Matters, Public Health Advocacy Institute.
3. The live web map can be used by local government authorities to inform the design of public health plans and policy.
4. Co-signed submissions align with advocacy work to implement policy changes that improve environmental conditions and address reducing the negative impacts of alcohol use.

The project was assisted by the work of thirteen students and volunteers during project activities. Housed in CERIPH, students were exposed to a research environment, and built their research skills and their health promotion competencies by engaging with a multidisciplinary team of researchers across public health.

The following Curtin University students supported the project:

Master of Public Health

- **Karen Ka-Ping Cheng:** Undertook a one-year research dissertation that complemented stage four of the Healthway project by conducting a parallel content analysis of five different alcohol brands on Instagram.

Bachelor of Science (Health Promotion)

- **Tneale Maher:** Supported the GIS data and intercept survey data collection.
- **Aili McMahon:** Supported the intercept survey data collection.
- **Caitlin Rees:** YPAG member. Assisted with the design and collation of the research summaries.
- **Georgia Williams:** Completed a 100-hour Health Promotion practicum which supported the development, recruitment, and establishment of the YPAG and terms of reference.

Bachelor of Science (Health Promotion) (Honours)

- **Brooklyn Royce:** Supported the GIS data collection and GIS and social media coding. Supported the intercept survey data collection.

Bachelor of Science (Health Sciences)

- **Caitlin Rhys-Maitland:** Supported the GIS data collection and collation.

Bachelor of Science (Nutrition) and Bachelor of Science (Health Promotion)

- **Nicola D'Orazio:** Faculty of Health Science Summer Scholarship recipient working on a project titled "Young People, Alcohol, and Aquatic Environments: An Intercept Survey," which supported stage five of the project.

The following young people supported the project:

- **Amy Van Niekerk, Bachelor of Arts:** YPAG member. Supported the intercept survey data recruitment and data collection and participated in the YPAG workshops.
- **Brody Nelson, Bachelor of Science (Health Promotion),** currently enrolled in Bachelor of Science (Psychology): YPAG member. Supported the design and refinement of the intercept survey data collection tools and participated in the YPAG workshops.
- **Jeel Jadeja, Bachelor of Science (Health Sciences):** YPAG member. Supported the design and refinement of the intercept survey data collection tools and participated in the YPAG workshops.
- **Cate Latimer, Bachelor of Health Science (Occupational Health and Safety and Health Promotion).** Supported the GIS data collection.
- **Emily Munro, Bachelor of Science (Health Sciences),** currently enrolled in Masters of Public Health: YPAG member. Supported the design and refinement of the intercept survey data collection tools and participated in the YPAG workshops. Elected Board Director RLSSWA, October 2024.

Dissemination – identifying appropriate audiences and tailoring the messages and media to them

A range of communication strategies were developed in consultation with the Alcohol Project Team to support dissemination. These included a dedicated project website, open access peer-reviewed publications, conference presentations and policy-focused seminars. Additionally, co-designed workshops were held with the YPAG and Research Collaborative. Project updates were shared

through e-newsletters, PowerPoint summaries, and research summaries, while social media channels like LinkedIn, X (formerly Twitter) and CERIPH and researcher profiles were used to highlight project findings and insights. Findings from the project have been made available in various formats and written for both academic and community audiences.

The following journal articles have been published or are under review:

Carey, R. N., Crawford, G., Jancey, J., Lam, T., Nimmo, L., Trapp, G., Pollard, C., Hooper, P., & Leavy, J. E. (2024). Young people's alcohol use in and around water: A scoping review of the literature. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 43(4), 874-896.

Leavy J.E., Crawford, G., Jancey, J., Carey, R. (2024). 283 Are you on Instagram? A content analysis of alcohol advertising, young people, aquatic locations and activity. *Injury Prevention*, 30, A61. (Conference proceeding).

Leavy, J.E., Crawford, G., Scarr, J. P., & Meddings, D. R. (2024). Drowning prevention: a global health promotion imperative, now more than ever. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, 35(4), 855-856.

Leavy, J.E., Hooper, P., Trapp, G., Carey, R.N., Crawford, G. Mapping alcohol advertising around waterways: An exploration of where and what the advertisements feature. (Under review).

Research summaries have been published and are available on the WAVE project website:

- Scoping review: What do we know about young people's use of alcohol in and around water? (September, 2024)
- Alcoholic environments and alcohol marketing (September, 2024)
- Young people and alcohol marketing on social media (September, 2024)
- Intercept survey findings and implications: A WA exploratory study (November, 2024)

The following presentations and workshops have been made:

Leavy, J.E., Carey, R.N. An overview of Alcohol Advertising Around Waterways: A Pilot Project to Capture Adverts on the Beach. Injury Prevention Network. Perth, Western Australia, 21st November, 2024. (Oral Presentation).

Leavy, J.E. Crawford, G., Nimmo, L., and Lam, T. Australian Water Safety Council, National Water Safety Strategy Workshop on Alcohol and Risk Taking, Melbourne, Victoria, 16th and 17th October 2024. (Oral Presentation).

Leavy, J.E., Nimmo, L. WA Department of Health. Knowledge Translation in Health. Perth, Western Australia, 26th September 2024. (Oral Presentation).

Leavy, J.E., Crawford, G., Jancey, J., and Carey, R. Are You on Instagram? A Content Analysis of Alcohol Advertising, Young People, Aquatic Locations, and Activities. SAFETY 2024 World Conference on Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion, New Delhi, India, 4th-6th September 2024. (Oral Presentation).

Leavy, J.E. YPAG: Sensemaking Workshop Pt 2. Perth, Western Australia, 31st July 2024. (Oral Presentation).

Leavy, J.E. YPAG: Sensemaking Workshop Pt 1. Perth, Western Australia, 4th July 2024. (Oral Presentation).

Leavy, J.E., Crawford, G., and Carey, R. Research Collective: Sensemaking Workshop. Perth, Western Australia, 19th July 2024. (Oral Presentation).

Leavy, J.E., Crawford, G., Trapp, G., Hooper, P., and Carey, R. Alcohol Advertising Around Waterways: A Pilot Project to Capture Adverts on the Beach. World Conference on Drowning Prevention, Perth, Western Australia, 4th-6th December 2023. (Oral Presentation).

Carey, R., Crawford, G., and Leavy, J.E. Young People's Alcohol Use Around Water: A Scoping Review of the Literature. World Conference on Drowning Prevention, Perth, Western Australia, 4th-6th December 2023. (Poster Presentation).

Leavy, J.E., Nimmo, L. Injury Matters Master Class: KT Presentation. Perth, Western Australia, 11th August 2023. (Oral Presentation).





Agenda for action

A proposed path forward to support state and national strategies, programs, and policies aimed at preventing alcohol-related injuries among young people is presented here.

Through a collaborative design process with key stakeholders, the project has developed six guiding recommendations. These high-level recommendations collate insights from all phases of the research, including sensemaking workshops, to expand the evidence base, enhance advocacy, and inform future policy, practice, and research on the impact of alcohol advertising in aquatic environments.



Recommendations

1

Recognise advocacy as a science.

Future endeavours to increase the evidence base need a well-coordinated, funded and sustained 'Advocacy through Research' strategy.

2

Mobilise public health partners.

Establish a coalition to address action on the commercial determinants of health recognising the consistent tactics used by commercial actors.

3

Tell the story through data.

Invest in building comprehensive state (and national) GIS maps and increased capacity for data integration to inform decision-makers and policymakers.

4

Make young people visible.

Support young people to amplify their voices by building their advocacy and leadership skills to address commercial determinants of health.

5

Start local.

Link Public Health Plans and alcohol policy as the first step to an integrated, consistent statewide approach to tackle alcohol advertising on public assets.

6

Address disproportionate impacts.

Explore and engage more diverse populations and voices recognising that commercial actors (such as the alcohol industry) target priority populations.

Actions for Policy

Focus: creating responsible alcohol marketing environments, emphasising regulation, policy and public health plans related to young people and local government settings.

Restriction of Alcohol Advertising

- Prevent under-18s from viewing online alcohol promotions.
- Restrict and regulate physical alcohol advertisements (including private venues).
- Prohibit alcohol sponsorships in sports and community events.
- Prevent alcohol from being glamourised in aquatic contexts.

Intersectoral Collaboration

- Find common ground with stakeholders across sectors (e.g. education, health, sport, travel and tourism).
- Promote cross-sector efforts in policy development.
- Integrate alcohol-related issues into all policy agendas.

Local Government Action

- Highlight aquatic harm/injury issues in public health plans.
- Align local health plans with state public health goals.

Enhancement of Regulatory Frameworks

- Stronger Australian Beverages Advertising Code regulations and enforcement.
- Ensure the alcohol advertising code is independent of industry control.

Meaningful Political and Youth Engagement

- Invest genuinely in youth advisory groups.
- Seek strong political commitment on alcohol issues.

Support for Policy Implementation

- Provide standardised templates/models for state and local advertising policies.
- Improve resources for effective policy adherence.

Actions for Practice

Focus: importance of getting the right public health messaging to the right people, strategic use of social media and influencers, innovative practices, research-driven regulatory changes, and expanding partnerships to enhance the impact of public health in an attempt to combat the powerful alcohol industry messaging.

Localised and Tailored Public Health

- Enhance public health messaging at the local government level, adapting content to fit regional and cultural contexts, including different settings.
- Tailor public health social media campaigns to specific locations and micro-target demographics.
- Continue to implement targeted, location-based messaging for public health campaigns, e.g. Don't Drink and Drown and Alcohol Think Again, to increase awareness, relevance and effectiveness.

Strategic Use of Social Media and Influencers

- Engage influencers, leverage advisory groups and program synergies for more impactful outreach.

Proactive Implementation

- Be brave with new interventions, seek policy maker support to trial safe to fail experiments where evidence can be translated quickly into practice.

Evidence-informed Advocacy

- Utilise the research to advocate for regulatory changes, such as adjustments to the Australian Beverages Advertising Code, to better protect young people.
- Improve advocacy efforts by showcasing successful interventions to inspire innovation in public health.

Partnership Expansion

- Increase the number of partnerships across sectors to amplify the reach and influence of public health initiatives.

Actions for Research

Focus: highlighting how the research collected has made a small contribution to the evidence base. However, there is much more work to do. The importance of translating research into actionable programs and policies that address the commercial determinants, specifically the alcohol industry, is long-term.

Increase Regional and Demographic Evidence

- Examine similarities and differences across regions.
- Research why harm patterns differ across locations.
- Study experiences and interventions across age, culture and other diverse groups.

Engage Diverse Populations and Voices

- Increase the diversity of voices in intercept surveys.
- Investigate social media and alcohol advertising among migrant and tourist populations.

Build Comprehensive Data Integration and Mapping

- Conduct comprehensive statewide mapping.
- Connect locations and events to enhance harm reduction efforts.
- Use GIS and environmental audits to link with drowning and broader health data.
- Emphasise the benefits of a mixed methods research approach.

Translating Research into Practice and Policy

- Timely translation of research findings into practical applications and policies.
- Connect research findings with the actors who work with harmful outcomes, e.g. drowning and injuries.
- Collaborate with LGAs who host waterways to ban advertisements and measure impact pre- and post-implementation.

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