

# Research Summary:

## Alcohol advertising and aquatic environments - Insights from young people

September 2024

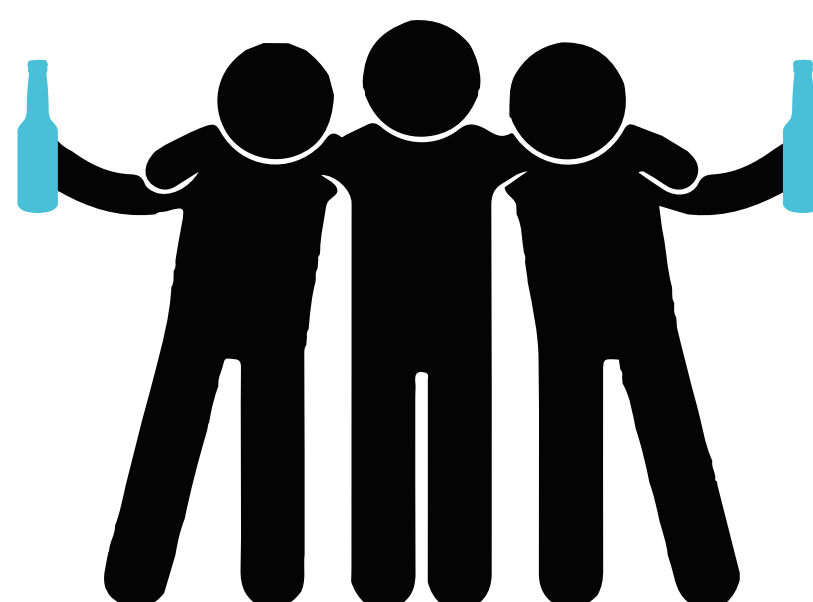


### The issue

Recent research has highlighted the significant impact of commercial interests on public health, including through the marketing of unhealthy products. The alcohol industry, in particular, employs various strategies to promote its products while framing alcohol consumption as socially acceptable and even beneficial. This has led to a normalisation of alcohol use, especially among young people, who are frequently exposed to advertising across multiple platforms.



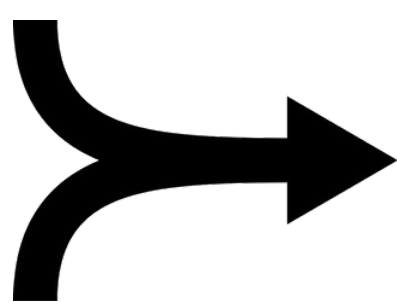
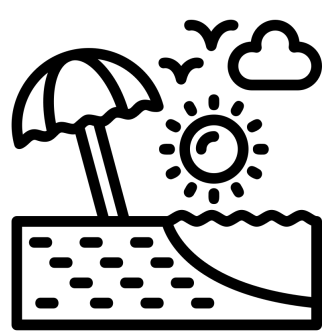
Evidence suggests that pervasive alcohol advertising shapes young people's perceptions and behaviours, promoting an environment where drinking is seen as integral to a desirable lifestyle. In this context, alcohol is often positioned as key to social success and enjoyment, particularly in settings like beaches and pools. By framing drinking as fun and relaxing in aquatic environments, such advertising may contribute to increase young people's risk of alcohol-related injury.



There is a growing need for research on how these commercial determinants of health, particularly the marketing tactics used by the alcohol industry, influence drowning prevention efforts. This study investigated the types of alcohol advertising young people recall, their perceptions of this advertising, and how these factors relate to their own alcohol consumption in aquatic environments.

# Study focus: Young people's views of alcohol advertising

The study used a cross-sectional survey to examine young people's exposure to and perceptions of alcohol advertising, particularly in relation to aquatic locations and activities. Young people were surveyed at a free coastal event in Perth, Western Australia, over four weeks in the Summer of 2024. Participants were approached by trained research assistants and provided an Uber gift voucher on completion of the survey to reimburse them for their time.



The survey was designed based on previous stages of the research project, including an audit of physical alcohol advertising in five coastal precincts and a content analysis of the posts of five alcohol brands on Instagram. Questions covered the use of alcohol around water, recall and perceptions of alcohol advertising, and engagement with alcohol brands and products on social media. Input from the study's Young People Advisory Group and representatives from key stakeholder organisations helped to refine survey questions and data collection methods.

## Key findings

Most participants reported seeing alcohol advertisements frequently, primarily through digital media (television and streaming services) and online (including social media). Many had also engaged with alcohol products, brands, and companies on social media. Nearly half of all participants had liked posts from alcohol brands and around one in six young people had participated in a competition related to alcohol products on social media.

**1 in 3** people surveyed had clicked a link from social media to an alcohol website

Many young people agreed that alcohol advertising used narratives that suggest alcohol contributes to feeling more social, relaxed, and confident. However, they were less likely to agree that alcohol may lead to sporting or work success.



More than half of the young people surveyed had consumed alcohol before or while participating in aquatic activities in the past year, with this behaviour referred to as **drinking and swimming**. Results showed that those who interacted more with alcohol brands online or recalled seeing more alcohol advertisements were significantly more likely to engage in this risk-taking behaviour.



Over **50%** of participants reported seeing alcohol ads at least once a week

Drinking and swimming was **more prevalent** for those frequently exposed to alcohol ads

Males were **3x more likely** to drink and swim than females

## The role of alcohol marketing in shaping young people’s perceptions and behaviours

Findings highlight concerning practices among young people, with many reporting drinking and swimming. Drinking and swimming was more prevalent among those frequently exposed to alcohol advertising, particularly on social media. In addition, many young people believed that alcohol advertising conveys positive associations of alcohol use, including increased confidence and sociability, contravening the industry’s self-regulated Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC).

In addition, many young people believed that alcohol advertising conveys positive associations of alcohol use, including increased confidence and sociability. This directly contravenes the industry’s self-regulated Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC) responsible alcohol marketing guidelines.

## Implications for public health

In the context of drowning prevention and water safety, this study has highlighted how the alcohol industry uses advertising and other forms of promotion to shape young people’s perceptions and behaviours regarding alcohol. Findings suggest that advertising may play a role in normalising alcohol use among young people, particularly in aquatic settings.

There is a need for more robust alcohol advertising regulations, especially on social media platforms where young people are heavily engaged. Greater public health interventions are required to address the commercial determinants of health and mitigate the effects of the alcogenic environment.