

WCTU E-Issues 2008

An email lobby group of WCTU Drug-Free Lifestyles

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Dear WCTU supporters,

The media today has reported that the Federal Liberal Party is planning to block the tax on alcopops in the Senate. While this tax alone will not solve the problem of youth binge drinking, it will be one step that will help as there is a proven link between price and consumption of alcohol. Alcopops (pre-mixed spirits plus soft drink or fruit juice to make them taste nice, often referred to as RTDs) are deliberately marketed to teenagers, especially girls, and the health consequences of the current binge drinking epidemic will be enormous.

Here are some facts:

The Age Education Supplement 14/3/08 “Booze nation”

- 14 – 20 year-olds have the highest rates of alcohol consumption in Australia.
- 1 in 10 young people 14 – 19 drink at risky or high risk levels weekly.
- Among 12 – 15 year-olds who drink, the proportion what drink at risky levels doubled between 1984 an 2005.
- National Drug Research Insitiute estimates that one Australian teenager dies and more than 60 are hospitalised each week from alcohol-related causes.
- Drinking to excess increases your vulnerability to sexual risk taking, violence, serious injury and death.
- Alcohol cost the Australian community about \$15.3 billion in 2004-5 through crime, violence, treatment, loss of productivity and premature death. It is the second biggest contributor to chronic disease in Australia after smoking.

6/8/07 Jill Stark. “Alcopops target teen Drinkers”

Mat Baxter, a marketing executive behind vodka-based drink ‘Absolute Cut’ said that the market was booming for high strength, pre-mixed spirits that “get young people drunk faster”

He said that the RTD market, described by some in the industry as the “Binge Drinker” category – was dominated by stronger, 7% alcohol drinks with appeal to young people on a budget.

“It’s one of the few drinks where you don’t necessarily know you’re drinking alcohol and that’s a conscious effort to make those drinks more appealing to young people,” he said. “The drinks are very much about masking the alcohol taste.”

“Young people could buy 3 drinks with 7% alcohol and get the same effect for less outlay than if they bought five 5.5% drinks,” he said.

2005 national survey of alcohol use by secondary school students showed that 47% of girls aged 12 – 17 and 14% of boys that age had drunk pre-mixed spirits in the previous week.

I have sent a votergram message through Fairgo (Greg Bloomfield: greg@fairgo.org) that will be sent to every Federal Coalition MP. WCTU has paid a subscription to Fairgo so if you let Greg know that you are doing this through WCTU he will send it for free. Otherwise you could Google "Parliament of Australia" and get the email addresses of your Federal Liberal MPs, especially the Senators, and email them with a short message in your own words.

My votergram said:

I was appalled to read in The Age today that the Liberal Part is planning to block the tax on alcopops in the Senate. The link between price and consumption of alcohol has long been established and, even if it just slows the increase in consumption as suggested by the Government, the taxes would be one step towards curbing binge drinking by young people, especially among girls to whom alcopops are marketed. This is a huge problem that will impact seriously on the health of young people and lead to a great increase in babies being born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. The future health costs will be great. This is a matter that is too serious to be the subject of party politics and I am very surprised and saddened by the Liberal Party's attitude. On their own, taxes will not solve the problem, but they will help. Another very effective step would be to limit the allowable alcohol content of alcopops to 3% or, at the most, 5%. Suggestions that young people will just move to spirits are red herrings. They are hooked on alcopops because of their flavour and packaging.

(Give your name and address or email address)

Thank you for acting on this. I would welcome any feedback.

Anne Bergen
National WCTU Secretary