

# Alcohol industry says adverts don't increase consumption, no need for tighter rules

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The alcohol industry has hit back at calls for greater restrictions on how its product is advertised, saying there's no evidence advertising increases consumption.

Nor is it targeting people aged under the legal drinking age, says the NZ Alcohol Beverages Council (NZABC), despite Broadcasting Minister Kris Faafoi saying there's been a noticeable increase in alcohol adverts on social media this year.

A number of groups - including the New Zealand Medical Association (NZMA), Alcohol Healthwatch, Hāpai te Hauora Māori Public Health and the Cancer Society [want the Government to tighten legislation around alcohol marketing](#), saying a recent update to the advertising industry's self-imposed regulations aren't good enough.

"We know that tamariki Māori and Pasifika children are disproportionately exposed to alcohol marketing - this drives and maintains the substantial inequities in alcohol harm that they experience," said Selah Hart, chief executive of Hāpai te Hauora Māori Public Health.

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The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) [this week unveiled new guidelines for alcohol advertising](#), which will come into force in April.

"There have been voluntary standards for a long time, there have been various understandings with the alcohol industry, there have been council recommendations - there have been all kinds of things over the years," said NZMA chair Kate Baddock.

"But nothing is going to work nearly as well as the Government taking leadership on this issue and actually setting some regulations in place that control how the alcohol industry can advertise, and generally speaking the marketing of alcohol - particularly where children are involved."

NZABC executive director Bridget McDonald said the industry had been "proactively" taking steps to limit the exposure of alcohol advertising to youth, and is happy with the ASA's changes.

"Many people think that advertising increases consumption, but this is simply not true. The fact is consumption in New Zealand has been steadily falling over the past decade or so," she said.

"Advertising is all about brand promotion and tends to influence a consumer's brand preferences or strengthens a company's brand positioning rather than increasing consumption."

[Statistics show](#) fewer people aged 15-17 consume at least one drink a year than in the past - down from 75 percent in 2006 to 58 percent last year.

"Globally, virtually all research has found that alcohol marketing, such as sports sponsorship or social media advertising, has no or very modest effects on overall alcohol consumption," said McDonald. "Research shows consumption in New Zealand has actually dropped, even while marketing spend has increased."

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Faafai said the Government is "committed to reducing the harm that drinking is doing, especially to young people", and told Newshub "during the COVID-19 national lockdown it became clear that the prevalence of advertising of alcohol products was increasing, particularly through online channels".

But he didn't outline any specific steps the Government might take.

"This would be looked at as part of any review of the legislation to make sure it is fit for purpose," he told Newshub.

"The Government expects people licensed to sell alcohol to know and abide by their obligations... The Government has many pressing priorities and work on alcohol laws would need to fit in with these."

The last time laws around alcohol sale and promotion were updated was 2012, putting "some restrictions on irresponsible alcohol promotions and activities", said Faafai.