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'Safe drinking' campaign prompts calls for sober rethink of alcohol-related advertising during football games

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[Email article](#) [Print](#) [Reprints & permissions](#)Health groups have expressed concerns over the prevalence of alcohol-related advertising during AFL broadcasts. *Photo: Judy Green*

Families who sit down to watch the AFL preliminary final on Friday night will probably be swamped by alcohol advertising throughout the game, experts say.

Public health groups are outraged that a new safe drinking campaign sponsored by the alcohol industry will run at the same time as huge numbers of alcohol ads.

Some coverage will also feature alcohol-sponsored half-times, sending a mixed message that could influence children watching the games, the groups say.

Curtin University professor Mike Daube, who is the director of the McCusker Centre for Action on Alcohol and Youth, said there was a "mountain" of alcohol advertising during the football finals.

"It is absolutely massive right now, and we are starting to see a relatively new phenomenon ... on Foxtel, which is the 'Jim Beam half-time' – which, to me, is nothing more than alcohol advertising at a time that children are going to be most influenced by it," he said.

He was particularly concerned by [two new campaigns from safe-drinking group DrinkWise](#).

The "[You won't miss a moment](#)" campaign warns viewers they may miss parts of the football if they are too drunk, while a second arm of the [controversial "How to drink properly"](#) ads will be run during schoolies week.

"They are running responsible drinking ads that to me seem to promote drinking, at the same time as [the industry] is absolutely drowning us in alcohol promotion," he said. "If they really were serious ... they would cut their advertising and give their money to an independent body."

The DrinkWise website [says](#) six of its 13 directors hold senior positions with alcohol companies.

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education chief executive Michael Thorne said the new ads were creatively brilliant, but showed Drinkwise "had pretty much dropped the pretension that they were a health-promoting organisation".

"It's even branded with Carlton United Breweries and I think anyone would look at this and think it's promoting drinking," he said.

David Jernigan, one of the world's foremost alcohol marketing experts who is in Australia to give the keynote address at the Public Health Association of Australia annual conference, said at least 15 [major long-term studies](#) showed the more young people were exposed to alcohol advertising [the more likely they were to drink earlier](#), and [drink more](#).

"Like adults, they get saturated ... it normalises it," Dr Jernigan, an associate professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in the US, said.

He said a [recent study he conducted found children who were exposed to brand advertising were more likely to consume that brand](#).

But Brewers Association chief executive Denita Wawn said the research on children and alcohol advertising did not show a causal link.

"We know from research that the biggest influence on children is their parents, and their peers," she said. "About 60 to 80 per cent of children [watching football] will be watching it with their parents, so it does come back down to parental responsibility."

And Carlton & United Breweries corporate affairs director Jeremy Griffith said the group was proud of its association with sporting events.

"We think it is good that adults can go to the footy and enjoy a beer," he said. "Underage drinking continues to decline so the health lobby argument lacks credibility. The public does not support abstinence, but supports marketing done responsibly."

A DrinkWise spokesman said its campaign was about reinforcing "the benefits of moderation at times and places when some people may make poor choices about how they consume alcohol".

"If they really were serious about wanting to promote sensible drinking they would cut their advertising and give their money to an independent body".

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