

STATE ALCOHOL ADVERTISING LAWS:

Current Status and Model Policies

Introduction

Alcohol Advertising: A Key Public Health Concern

The alcohol industry spends more than \$4.5 billion each year marketing its products.¹ Underage youth are exposed heavily to this marketing with its youthful themes and images and its placements in media with large youth audiences.² Limiting youth exposure to alcohol marketing is a major public health goal since underage drinking is a significant contributor to youth alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes, other forms of injury, violence, suicide, and problems associated with school and family.

The concern about alcohol marketing and underage drinking has been heightened by recent findings in the scientific research community. Studies have established that alcohol advertising exposure influences a young person's beliefs about alcohol and his/her intention to drink.³ They also suggest that advertising may have a direct impact on youth drinking practices and drinking problems.⁴ These findings are bolstered by similar studies of tobacco advertising, which has been shown to

influence the likelihood of young teenagers experimenting with tobacco.⁵

In response to this concern, public health advocates are increasingly urging policymakers to consider counter-advertising campaigns. State public health departments in California, Massachusetts and Florida made critical strides in reducing underage smoking rates in their states in recent years by sponsoring tobacco counter-advertising campaigns.⁶ Research indicates that this approach should also be used as part of a comprehensive public health strategy to reduce underage drinking.⁷

In addition to counter-advertising, the appeal of alcohol to underage youth can be limited by reducing youth exposure to alcohol advertising and marketing. This report undertakes the first nationwide examination, state by state, of the existing tools state officials have at their disposal to reduce youth exposure to alcohol advertising and marketing.

The Potential Role of State Enforcement

States have systems already in place for

administering alcohol advertising regulations, usually (but not always) housed in an Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) state agency. Alcohol producers, distributors and retailers must obtain state licenses to do business in a state. Although specific authority varies by state, in general, the ABC agencies have broad authority to enact regulations (based on state statutes), investigate potential violations, and impose administrative sanctions. In control states, which operate retail and/or wholesale operations, retail advertising practices can be established through operational procedures.

These factors point to the importance to the public health community of exploring the potential role of ABC agencies in regulating alcohol advertising. This report takes the initial step in this exploration. It identifies key state regulatory strategies that can be effective in reducing youth exposure to alcohol advertising and assesses current state practices, evaluating each state's current law and providing a means for each state to evaluate priorities for enforcement and statutory and regulatory reform.

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