

Submission to Proposal P1050 – Pregnancy warning labels on alcoholic beverages

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Authorised by the National President and Board Chair, Gemma Crawford

The Australian Health Promotion Association Ltd (AHPA®) is the peak body for health promotion in Australia and is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of all people. Australia is one of the healthiest countries in the world largely because of effective health promotion practice - creating social and environmental conditions that enable Australians to enjoy a healthy and happy life.

The misuse of alcohol remains a real and continuing threat to the health of current and future generations in Australia. Alcohol's contribution to Australia's total disease burden is unacceptable, with alcohol's misuse costing Australia 36 billion dollars annually, despite on-going industry self-regulation and 'responsible drinking' education campaigns.

AHPA strongly supports mandatory alcohol pregnancy warning labels on all alcohol products and commends FSANZ on the work that has been completed to ensure an effective delivery of the warning labels. Please see comments below for feedback on specific sections of P1050.

Comments to specified sections of P1050 Call for Submissions (CFS) report:

D. Literature review on the effectiveness of warning labels (section 3.1.1 of CFS)

AHPA has nil comment regarding the literature review undertaken.

E. Consumer testing of warning statements (section 3.1.2)

AHPA has nil comment regarding the consumer testing undertaken.

F. Pictogram (section 3.2.2.2)

AHPA supports the use of the proposed pictogram as part of the mandated pregnancy warning label.

G. Warning statement (section 3.2.2.3)

AHPA supports the use of either “*Any amount of alcohol can harm your baby*”, or “*Any amount of alcohol can cause lifelong harm to your baby*” as a warning statement, given both statements were deemed to reflect current public health advice with high accuracy in the consumer testing undertaken.

This said, based on better scores for being believable, credible and convincing to a female Australian sample, AHPA prefers the warning statement “*Any amount of alcohol can cause lifelong harm to your baby*”.

H. Design labelling elements (section 3.2.2.4)

AHPA supports the use of “*Health Warning*” as signal words rather than “*Warning*”, “*Government Warning*” or “*Pregnancy Warning*” for the reasons stated by FSANZ. That is, that “*Health Warning*” increases credibility, attracts more attention and aids in communicating the broader intention to provide information to the broader community.

With respect to design elements, AHPA supports being prescriptive so as to ensure consistency and readability of the warning across all alcoholic beverages. The following elements are supported on the basis that they draw attention to the warning and ensure readability:

- Red colour for signal wording,
- Red colour for the circle and diagonal strikethrough of the pictogram,
- Black border surrounding the warning,
- Use of sans-serif fonts only,
- White background inside the black border.

Additionally, AHPA recommends prescribing placement of the warning to be next to other commonly viewed information such as the number of standard drinks. Evidence suggests this may draw further attention to the warning¹.

Finally, given the evidence supplied that vertical presentation of warnings are not as easily noticed in comparison to horizontal warnings, AHPA recommends prescribing horizontal placement of the warning on all products and packaging.

I. Summary of proposed pregnancy warning label design (section 3.2.2.5)

Regarding label elements, see comments above in section H.

Regarding label size, AHPA proposes the threshold for pictogram only (ie. no warning text) be lowered to 150ml so as to include warning text on products such as 187ml bottles of wine. For products below 150mls, AHPA supports a pictogram only, of diameter of 8mm.

For products above 150mls, AHPA recommends the minimum font size required for all alcoholic beverages ≥ 150 ml to be 3mm. This will ensure readability and prominence and is consistent with the current font size required for warning statements.

¹ Hall & Partners (April 2018). *Understanding of consumer information messaging on alcohol products: Focus group testing report*. Canberra: Australia.

J. Beverages to carry the pregnancy warning label (section 3.2.3)

AHPA recommends the application of the mandatory pregnancy warning on beverages containing 0.5% ABV or more. AHPA agrees with the assertions of alternative public health stakeholders that this approach will:

- Align with current evidence that there is no known safe level of drinking alcohol during pregnancy,
- Be consistent with Code section 2.7.1-4, that food containing more than 0.5% ABV displays the number of standard drinks within,
- And address the concern that women may unknowingly cause harm by consuming products containing alcohol of 0.5% - 1.15% ABV.

K. Application to different types of sales (section 3.2.4)

AHPA has nil comment regarding the approach to different types of sales.

L. Application to different types of packages (section 3.2.5)

AHPA supports the proposed approach to labelling different types of packaging; that is that all layers of packaging will display the pregnancy warning label aside from bladders of alcoholic beverages within a box, and packaging where the inner label is visible from the outer packaging.

M. Consideration of costs and benefits (section 3.4.1.1 of CFS)

AHPA agrees with the updated cost benefit analysis, and strongly agrees that the benefits of preventing FASD far outweigh the costs of implementing mandatory labels on alcohol products.

N. Transitional arrangements (section 4.1 of CFS)

AHPA strongly supports a 12 month transition period so as to ensure the intended public health outcomes occur as soon as possible.

While it is acknowledged that a shorter transition period will place more burden on Industry, Industry's support for a three to four year transition period raises concern that they may delay compliance until the end of the transition period.

Given the poor uptake of the voluntary pregnancy warning labelling initiative, more onus needs to be placed on Industry to ensure timely uptake of the new mandatory requirements.

O. Draft variation to the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code (Attachment A of CFS)

AHPA has nil comments on the draft variation that have not already been covered in above sections.

P. Other comments (within the scope of P1050 – see section 1.5 of the CFS)

Regarding section 4.3 - Education, AHPA believes there is a need for the Australian Government to provide a comprehensive education campaign to ensure consumers are aware of the change and why.

Regarding section 4.4 - Evaluation and Monitoring, AHPA believes a great deal more work needs to be conducted prior to the end of the transition period, and prior to the gazettal of changes. Clear guidelines for monitoring need be created alongside clear guidelines for implementation. Further detail on what will be monitored, how it will be monitored, by whom, and what penalties will apply for non-compliance are all details that should be provided upon gazettal of the changes.

AHPA recommends a monitoring framework that includes measurement at a minimum of three time points; prior to gazettal of the changes, at a halfway point in the transition period and at the conclusion of the transition period. The halfway time point is of particular importance as this will allow FSANZ to monitor uptake and provide measures to support industry in their transition prior to the end of the transition period. This will additionally enable identification of specific barriers to uptake which may mitigate the risk of Industry delaying their compliance, or applying for an extension to the transition period. Monitoring compliance by specific liquor types and/or business types may provide additional benefit, allowing tailored support to be provided to Industry where necessary.

AHPA supports the proposed evaluation elements that will assess:

- Application of the label across the alcohol beverage industry
- Compliance with label requirements on products and packaging
- And the extent to which consumers recognise the label and understand the warning.

Yours sincerely

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