

NATIONAL LIQUOR NEWS

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World Health Organisation Leader no friend of industry

Most people in the alcohol industry are unaware of the role that the World Health Organisation has around alcohol regulation. It controls much of the international dialogue about alcohol and it funds a lot of research. National governments listen.

The WHO's head official is Director-General Dr Margaret Chan, and she recently gave a speech to a health promotion conference. On the proper future role for public health leaders, she said "...it is time for us to move to the top of the table, and have our say". Note the "us" and "our".

In regard to behaviour of industries, Dr Chan said "It is not just Big Tobacco anymore. Public health must also contend with Big Food, Big Soda, and Big Alcohol. All of these industries fear regulation, and protect themselves by using the same tactics."

These tactics include "front groups, lobbies, promises of self-regulation, lawsuits, and industry-funded research that confuses the evidence and keeps the public in doubt."

Industry tactics "also includecontributions to worthy causes that cast these industries as respectable corporate citizens in the eyes of politicians and the public".

Dr Chan also believes that it is an industry tactic to promote "arguments that place the responsibility for harm to health on individuals, and portray Government actions as interference in personal liberties and free choice".

I don't believe Dr Chan has much time for notions of individuals' controlling their own lives and choices. They simply can't be trusted either.

Nor does Dr Chan trust elected governments to do the right thing: "Few Governments prioritize health over big business. As we learned...., a powerful corporation can sell the public just about anything."

"Not one single country has managed to turn around its obesity epidemic in all age groups. This is not a failure of individual will-power. This is a failure of political will to take on big business."

The key issue is that the Director-General's opinions will now become a big stick to lobby Australian politicians. After all, no one wants to disagree with the WHO.