



Australians want greater education – not taxes – to address youth drinking problems

Eighty per cent of Australians believe a government-led campaign that educates young people about the effects of excessive alcohol consumption will deliver greater long-term benefits to the community than raising taxes on alcohol.

This is according to research conducted by Galaxy Research on behalf of the Distilled Spirits Industry Council of Australia (DSICA) – sending a strong message to the Federal Government as it prepares its first Budget.

The study - conducted before the Federal Government raised excise rates on pre-mixed alcohol products - found Australians believe education campaigns centred around the social impact of excessive drinking, greater policing of drunkenness, enforcement of liquor licensing laws, parental intervention and even increases to the legal drinking age would have a greater impact on drinking levels amongst young people than increasing alcohol taxes.

“The Rudd government has already announced an increase to the tax applied to pre-mixed spirits – claiming this will curb youth drinking and raise \$500 million a year in government revenue. This research suggests this policy is inconsistent with the wider community view on how to address the issue of problem drinking in young people,” said Gordon Broderick, Executive Director of DSICA.

“Only three per cent of Australians believe that increasing tax is the most effective way to address excessive alcohol consumption among young people,” he said.

“Even those Australians who are not opposed to an increase in the taxes applied to alcohol acknowledge that this approach will have little long-term benefit to the Australian community.”

The Galaxy Research study found most Australians believe young people would benefit from greater information and advice about the problems of excessive drinking.

“The consensus is that an education campaign should focus on the social impact of excessive alcohol consumption – especially how judgement is impaired and how drinkers expose themselves to unnecessary risk,” Mr Broderick said.

He argues much more of the \$6.9 billion collected in the coming financial year through taxes on alcohol should be directed towards education initiatives.

“There was no need to single out a single product category – pre-mixed spirits – to fund all the preventative health initiatives for alcohol, obesity and smoking,” Mr Broderick added.



The Galaxy Research study found significant misconceptions surrounding alcohol consumption within the Australian community. Two thirds of respondents incorrectly believe Australians drink more today than was the case 20 years ago, while more than 50 per cent believe binge-drinking is prevalent among young people.

Mr Broderick claims much of the debate surrounding alcohol consumption and taxation in Australia is based on half-truths. "There is a real need for accurate information to help shape community attitudes and, ultimately, formulate government policy," he added.

Mr Broderick highlighted that:

- Adult per capita alcohol consumption in Australia has fallen below 1970s and 80s levels and has been consistent for the past 15 years. ¹
- There has been no significant increase in adult per capita alcohol consumption since the tax system was reformed on 1 July 2000. ¹
- The numbers of 12-15 year olds and 16-17 year olds consuming alcohol have not changed over the past 15 years despite the advent of ready-to drink (RTD) alcohol products. ²
- RTDs contain approximately the same alcohol content per serve as beer, yet are now taxed at 47 cents more per standard drink, and around half the alcohol content of cask wine, yet are taxed at 78 cents more per standard drink. ³

The Galaxy Research study found that while looking to government to lead a community education campaign, the majority of Australians believe ultimate responsibility for problem drinking in young Australians rests with the individual and their parents.

This survey was conducted by Galaxy Research on Wednesday 23 April and Thursday 24 April 2008. The results are based on the opinions of 615 adults aged 18-64 years distributed throughout Australia. To ensure the results truly reflect the opinions of the Australian population the data has been weighted and projected to Australian Bureau of Statistics population estimates.

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References:

1. ABS, DSICA Pre-Budget Submission 2008-09
2. ASSA 2002, ASSA 2005, DSICA Pre-budget submission 2008-09
3. DSICA Pre-Budget Submission 2008-09