Letters

The extent of alcohol advertising in Australia: an audit of bus stop advertisements

To the Editor: There is significant concern about drinking patterns and alcohol-related harm among young people. A comprehensive approach to preventing harm from alcohol is needed, with population approaches including curbs on alcohol promotion.[1] The National Preventative Health Taskforce has recommended phasing out alcohol promotions "from times and placements which have high exposure to young people".[1]

Exposure to alcohol advertising influences young people; research consistently shows strong associations between exposure to alcohol advertising and young people's early initiation to alcohol, and increased consumption if they already use alcohol.[2] Concerns about the ability of Australia's system of self-regulation to prevent young people's exposure to alcohol promotions are well documented.[3,4]

The entire community is exposed to outdoor advertising; it dominates public spaces and is visible throughout the day. Advertisements on public transport and at transit stops are a common form of outdoor alcohol promotion. Young people are more likely than older people to use public transport[5] and therefore are expected to be exposed to promotions placed in connection with bus stops.

To provide a snapshot of the volume of alcohol advertising on bus stop hoardings in an Australian capital city, we audited bus stop advertisements in Perth, Western Australia. The auditors (one of us [HLP] and a research assistant) followed a predetermined route within a 15 km radius of the Perth central business district on 6 December

2012 and 5 February 2013 (a total of 144 km). The product type on each advertisement was recorded.

Over the two audit sessions, 172 of 744 bus stop advertisements identified were for alcohol products (23.1%). In each audit session, alcohol was the dominant product category. In the alcohol category, there were 74 advertisements (43.0%) for beer, 70 advertisements (40.7%) for wine products, 27 advertisements (15.7%) for spirits and ready-to-drink products and one advertisement (0.6%) for cider.

These results provide further evidence that self-regulation is failing to prevent exposure of children and young people to alcohol advertising.[3,4] Legislated curbs on alcohol advertising which effectively prevent such exposure are urgently required as part of a comprehensive approach to preventing alcohol-related harm.

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Competing interests: No relevant disclosures.

doi: 10.5694/mja13.10317

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