

## **Zero alcohol product advertising pushing boundaries by creating new drinking occasions, new research finds**

*Two thirds of advertisements studied showed zero alcohol products being promoted during activities that are traditionally alcohol-free*

Alcohol companies are exploiting weak advertising rules by promoting alcohol-branded zero alcohol products in new drinking contexts such as while driving, swimming, and in the gym, new research has found.

The study, published on Tuesday, 14 April, in the *Drug and Alcohol Review*, analysed 30 marketing campaigns for zero or very low alcohol products that share branding with alcohol products. The campaigns promoted 13 zero alcohol products in Australia and six in New Zealand between 2018 and 2024.

The research reveals almost two thirds (63%) of all analysed campaigns showed zero and very low alcohol products being used in settings that are traditionally alcohol-free.

Examples include a campaign featuring a woman drinking a zero alcohol beer as she stepped off a treadmill, and another featuring someone drinking a zero alcohol beer while swimming, driving a go-kart, and operating heavy machinery.

### **Key findings include:**

- Research found that almost two-thirds (63%) of the campaigns featured zero alcohol products being used in situations and contexts that are traditionally alcohol-free.
- These included water-based environments (37%), driving-related settings (36%), and adventure or outdoor activity locations (30%).
- 20% of campaigns showed zero alcohol products in exercise or sporting contexts.
- 27% used fitness-related benefits and 23% used themes of feeling more productive.
- 73% of campaigns showed zero alcohol products in a traditional drinking context (e.g., a bar or pub), whereby the zero alcohol product could be seen as an alternative to alcohol. However, many of these campaigns also promoted the use of zero alcohol products on novel occasions.

Cancer Council is calling for the federal government to set higher standards for alcohol advertising, including for the marketing of zero alcohol products that share branding with alcohol products.

**Deputy Chair of Cancer Council’s Nutrition, Alcohol and Physical Activity Committee and co-author, Julia Stafford** said the findings highlight the urgent need to strengthen Australia’s standards for alcohol advertising.

“Alcohol brands are exploiting Australia’s weak advertising rules by placing zero alcohol products in traditionally alcohol-free situations and contexts, like in gyms, before or while driving, operating heavy machinery and even cliff jumping.

“While zero alcohol products may be a suitable option for adults who want to cut back on alcohol, only some of the advertising campaigns exclusively promoted the zero alcohol products as alternatives to alcohol. Many advertisements featured scenarios and activities where alcohol wouldn’t usually be used, limiting any potential public health benefits from use of these products.

“Reducing use of alcoholic products can help reduce cancer risk. Alcohol is known to cause at least seven types of cancer, including cancer of the mouth, throat, oesophagus, breast, liver and bowel,” said Stafford.

Australia’s current alcohol advertising controls rely primarily on voluntary rules set by the alcohol industry itself. The industry rules have long been criticised for prioritising alcohol company interests over community wellbeing and are even weaker in regard to alcohol-branded zero alcohol products than for alcoholic products.

“Cancer Council is urging the federal government to close this zero-alcohol loophole and introduce higher standards for alcohol brand marketing, promotion and sponsorship to reduce community exposure to alcohol marketing,” said Stafford.

**-ENDS-**

**Contact details**

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**About Cancer Council Australia**

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- Undertake and fund cancer research
- Prevent and control cancer
- Provide information and support for people affected by cancer
- Shape and influence policy and practice

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