



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

Friday 22 November 2024

### **Concerning new data shows three in four Australian adults are misled by health-related claims on alcohol labels**

New research from Cancer Council Victoria's Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer shows three in four Australian adults (75%) misunderstood at least one health-related claim on an alcohol product, incorrectly believing that it meant the product was better for them.

Participants were asked about their perceptions of health-related claims, or "cues", on alcohol labels, such as 'low sugar' or 'low carb'. Participants were also asked about how important the amount and type of alcohol consumed was when considering alcohol associated health risks, including cancer.

The study, published today in the journal *Health Promotion International*, surveyed 1,960 Australians aged 18-65 who drank alcohol in the year prior to their participation. The research found the most common misperceptions were about low sugar (55.7%), calorie content (51.5%), and carbohydrate claims (48.8%).

Lead researcher of the study, Dr Ashleigh Haynes, from Cancer Council Victoria's Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer says almost two thirds (60.9%) of Australian adults surveyed thought the type of alcohol they drink affects their health just as much as the amount they drink.

"This research reflects how the alcohol industry exploits consumer misperceptions of its marketing cues. Health risks are not reduced by drinking specific types of alcoholic products, but our findings show how widespread this misperception is."

The study also found young adults (18-24 years) were more likely to misperceive various health-related claims as 'better for you' compared to older adults (45-65 years).

Dr Haynes says, "This is most likely because these cues are predominantly targeted at younger, more health-conscious audiences. We've seen them becoming more common on alcohol labels at the same time as this younger generation reached the legal drinking age."

"People who drank alcohol on five or more days a week were more likely to believe that health-related claims on the label meant the product was 'better for you', compared to those who consumed alcohol less than once a month."

Julia Stafford, Deputy Chair of Cancer Council's Nutrition, Alcohol and Physical Activity Committee, says this research demonstrates the need to strengthen restrictions on health-related claims on alcohol labels.

"We know that these cues can give alcohol products a 'health halo' – making them sound like a healthy purchase when, really, they're not. It's the amount of alcohol (or ethanol) in a product that increases cancer risk, not the type of alcohol. 'Low carb' or 'low sugar' alcohol products aren't healthier for you."



“The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classifies alcohol as a group 1 carcinogen, which means there is strong evidence that it causes cancer. While even small amounts of alcohol increase your cancer risk, the more you drink the greater your risk of developing seven types of cancer including breast, bowel, throat and mouth cancer. Alcoholic products are also high in energy (kilojoules or calories) and can easily contribute to overweight or obesity, which increases the risk of 13 types of cancer.”

The research comes as Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), the food regulator, consider a proposal to change the Food Standards Code which would permit the use of low carb and low sugar claims on alcohol product labels.

Ms Stafford says that Cancer Council is urging FSANZ and Food Ministers to consider higher standards for alcohol labelling to protect the health of Australians.

“Australians have the right to know if the products they’re consuming can cause harm. Alcohol companies shouldn’t be allowed to use marketing tactics that suggest their products are nutritious or ‘healthier’.”

-ENDS-

Read the paper in *Health Promotion International* here: [Prevalence and predictors of misperceptions of ‘better-for-you’ alcohol products among Australian adult drinkers | Health Promotion International | Oxford Academic](#)

#### **Contact details**

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#### **About Cancer Council Australia**

Cancer Council Australia is Australia’s leading cancer charity, working to reduce the impact of cancer for all Australians. Cancer Council Australia works with its members, the eight state and territory Cancer Councils to:

- 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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