

Reframing zero alcohol products: industry narratives, marketing activity, and implications for alcohol policy

Danica Keric¹, Fraser Edwardes¹, Julia Stafford¹, Nathan J. Harrison^{2,3}, Joelle Mandzufas¹, Ashlea Bartram^{2,3}, Simone Pettigrew⁴

¹*Cancer Council Western Australia, Perth, Australia*, ²*Flinders Health and Medical Research Institute, College of Medicine and Public Health, Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia*,

³*National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction, Flinders Health and Medical Research Institute, College of Medicine and Public Health, Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia*, ⁴*The George Institute for Global Health, UNSW Sydney, Sydney, Australia*

Presenter's email: danica.keric@cancerwa.asn.au

Introduction: Zero alcohol products are increasingly promoted by the alcohol industry as a public health-aligned strategy supporting moderation and reducing harm from alcohol. However, a growing body of research suggests these products serve commercial objectives that complicate their public health potential.

Approach: This presentation synthesises findings from two studies investigating alcohol industry tactics and activities regarding zero alcohol products. The first analysed alcohol industry narratives in public-facing versus industry-facing communications regarding zero alcohol products. The second examined the content of alcohol-branded zero alcohol product marketing campaigns across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. We will discuss common themes across both studies.

Key Findings: Across both studies, zero alcohol products were positioned as serving a corporate social responsibility purpose for the alcohol industry, being described as tools for moderation and replacements for alcohol products. However, commentary by alcohol industry representatives in industry-facing publications highlights that zero alcohol products are a tool that drives market growth for the industry by increasing brand awareness and creating new drinking opportunities. Our analysis of marketing campaigns found that almost two-thirds (63%) of campaigns promoted zero alcohol products in the context of new drinking occasions, for example at the gym, while driving, or while operating heavy machinery. Collectively, the findings indicate that zero alcohol products function as part of broader ecosystems created by alcohol companies that sustain drinking norms.

Discussions and Conclusions: We will argue that alcohol-branded zero alcohol products, given the intentions by alcohol industry representatives and current marketing practices, are better understood and regulated as strategic extensions of alcohol brand systems than as straightforward harm reduction tools.

Implications on policy: Findings highlight the need for policy responses that address broader alcohol marketing activities to help ensure that zero alcohol products contribute meaningfully to harm reduction rather than reinforcing alcohol-related norms and use.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: This research was supported by a Western Australian Government Mental Health Commission service agreement (MHC778) and a Healthway service agreement (G-202403-86909) for projects to support reducing harm from alcohol. A.B. receives funding from the Australian Department of Health, Disability and Ageing to support research regarding alcohol and other drugs. S.P. is funded by a National Health and Medical Research Council Investigator Grant (APP2034602).