



SAAPA SA Alcohol Taxation Policy Campaign

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Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Evidence to support South Africa's public health issue that we need to address.

The Southern African Alcohol Policy Alliance in South Africa (SAAPA SA) warns that alcohol advertising is not just selling brands, it is **shaping children's behaviour, fuelling underage drinking, and driving lifelong harm.**

A growing body of evidence from South Africa and abroad makes the case clear:

- **Advertising increases the risk of underage drinking.** A national analysis of **SABSSM 2017** data showed that South African children aged **12–14 who were exposed to alcohol adverts were significantly more likely to drink** compared to peers with no exposure.
- **Marketing makes children drink more, and sooner.** The **International Alcohol Control (IAC) study in South Africa** found a direct association between adolescent alcohol use and **exposure to marketing**, particularly when children reported liking adverts.
- **Global studies quantify exposure.** Research using **wearable cameras** in countries such as New Zealand and Australia has shown children are **exposed to alcohol marketing every 4–8 minutes** in their daily lives, including billboards, store displays, and sports sponsorships. Comparable patterns are visible in South Africa's townships and cities.
- **WHO evidence reviews** conclude that children repeatedly exposed to alcohol advertising are more likely to **start drinking younger, to drink more heavily, and to develop hazardous drinking patterns** later in life.
- **Advertising exposure fuels risky environments.** Local policy studies (LSHTM/STRIVE, Soul City) show how weak advertising regulation has enabled **alcohol sponsorship in sport, pervasive billboard exposure near schools, and aggressive digital marketing**, reinforcing drinking cultures linked to **gender-based violence, road crashes, and poverty.**

“Alcohol advertising is grooming the next generation of drinkers. Every billboard, sports sponsorship and social media post is an invitation to our children to drink. This is not harmless branding — it is predatory marketing, and its effects are devastating: violence in our homes, blood on our roads, and illness in our hospitals. South Africa cannot continue to let the industry target our children.” *Nomcebo Dlamini Campaign Director SAAPA SA*

Local evidence confirms the crisis

The **Planet Youth 2025 Survey**, conducted by the University of Cape Town (UCT) and the Western Cape Government, confirms the lived reality in South Africa. Surveying **49,000 Grade 8 and 9 learners across 123 schools** with an **89% response rate**, the findings are stark:

- **40%** have already tried alcohol.
- **22%** drank in the past 30 days.
- **23%** started before the age of 13.

The True Cost of Alcohol

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- **26%** report being drunk at least once; **15%** in the past month.
- Alcohol is most often sourced from **shops (53%)**, **friends (43%)**, and **family members (34%)**.
- Drinking peaks during **public holidays (72%)**, at **friends' homes (54%)**, and **after exams (51%)**, showing how deeply embedded alcohol is in social life.

SAAPA's Call to Action

South Africa has some of the **highest rates of alcohol-related harm globally**, with alcohol linked to **over half of violent injuries, 27% of road deaths, and billions of rands in economic losses annually**. Yet the industry continues to spend millions marketing alcohol to children and communities.

SAAPA SA calls for urgent action:

- **Ban advertising likely to reach youth**, including billboard placement near schools, sports sponsorships, and online adverts targeting young people.
- **End industry self-regulation**, introduce statutory restrictions in line with **WHO recommendations**.
- **Protect communities**, invest in safe, alcohol-free recreational and cultural spaces for young people.
- **Measure exposure**, implement independent monitoring systems (e.g. wearable camera audits) to track children's real-world marketing exposure.

The science is clear. The harm is measurable. The victims are our children.

Alcohol advertising is not a side issue — it is a public health emergency. To save lives and secure South Africa's future, government must act decisively to break the link between marketing, youth drinking, and lifelong harm.

Signed release: Ms Nomcebo Dlamini Campaign Director

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