Trouble Brewing: Four major global health organizations warn that countries are ignoring the harms of alcohol consumption

Language English

Countries engaged in the UN General Assembly's High-Level Meeting on NCDsare urged to enact lifesaving policies

Sept. 24, 2018, 8 am ET (New York, USA) - Alcohol is a leading contributor to death and disability worldwide, but governments haven't responded to the issue with the attention, resources and action this urgent issue requires, says "Trouble Brewing [1]," a new report from global health and development organizations, Vital Strategies [2], the NCD Alliance [3], IOGT International [4] and the Global Alcohol Policy Alliance (GAPA [5]). The report debunks misconceptions about alcohol use, exposes industry tactics to market to youth and women and derail regulation, and emphasizes the urgency of implementing proven, evidence-based policies.

An estimated 3 million people die every year as a result of alcohol consumption, according to the 2018 Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health released by the World Health Organization [6] this month. Alcohol is a leading risk factor for premature death and disability among people between the ages of 15 and 49.

> "Governments have the opportunity to prevent millions of deaths from harmful alcohol use every year," said Dr. Adam Karpati, Senior Vice President, Public Health Programs at the global health organization, Vital Strategies. " 'Trouble Brewing' highlights actionable steps that governments and the global health community

> can take to reduce alcohol's social, health and economic harms. We hope this report empowers civil society from across health and development sectors to advocate to governments to adopt these proven measures."

The report lays out the burden of the harmful use of alcohol, identifies the most important interventions governments can take, and describes the influence and threats to alcohol policy that come from the alcohol industry.

- Globally, the harmful use of alcohol is the fifth leading risk factor for premature death and disability and among the top risk factors for noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) such as cancer and cardiovascular disease. Alcohol use also increases susceptibility to communicable diseases such as tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS and contributes to suicide.

- Alcohol doesn't only harm the person who consumes alcohol: it plays a significant role in violent incidents including homicide and sexual violence and studies show [7] that drink driving increases the risk of a fatal road crash up to 17 times.

- The report highlights the most cost-effective strategies for reducing alcohol-related harms, which are included in the WHO "Best Buys" recommendations for prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases:

1. Increasing excise taxes on alcoholic beverages to reduce affordability
2. Regulating the availability of alcohol – how, when, and to whom it is sold
3. Restricting exposure to alcohol advertising.

- A barrier to strong alcohol policies has been misperceptions around the health benefits of moderate alcohol consumption. The most recent and rigorous analysis of the evidence showed that there is no net health benefit from any level of alcohol consumption.

"Alcohol use is increasing most noticeably in countries where marketing and use of commercially produced alcohol is expanding," said Rebecca Perl, lead author of "Trouble Brewing" and Vice President of Partnerships and Initiatives at Vital Strategies. "The industry is targeting young people and women to increase sales, and effectively avoiding regulation by adopting largely ineffective, voluntary guidelines. Their playbook takes a page from the tobacco industry and requires a comparable policy response to protect youth and help save lives."

> "Alcohol can be toxic, carcinogenic and addictive," said Katie Dain, Chief Executive Officer of the NCD Alliance. "It causes and perpetuates harm to those who drink alcohol and those around them, particularly children impacted by the alcohol use of others. As long as governments are failing to act to reduce the harm caused by alcohol, their people, economy and public services will continue to suffer and bear the high cost unnecessarily. We encourage advocates to use 'Trouble Brewing' to engage with a wide range of stakeholders to build support for policy action that will also help governments make progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals."

"Alcohol causes seven types of cancer, but only very few people know about this. Alcohol is a major obstacle to sustainable development, adversely affecting 13 of 17 SDGs," said Kristina Sperkova, International President of IOGT International. " 'Trouble Brewing' clearly shows the social justice dimension of alcohol-related harm and how we can build a better world for all by curbing Big Alcohol and implementing high-impact, cost-effective and evidence-based best buy alcohol policy solutions."

"We see that alcohol markets in the West are saturated and alcohol producers are looking for new markets in low- and middle-income countries," said Øystein Bakke, Secretary of the Global Alcohol Policy Alliance. "These markets, with a young population and growing economies, often lack the regulatory framework necessary to check a trajectory of increasing alcohol consumption. 'Trouble Brewing' is making the case for effective alcohol control policies today to prevent the potential for rising alcohol use and its harmful effects in the future."

"Trouble Brewing" is being launched in advance of the third UN High-Level Meeting on NCDs. It has been written to provoke discussion and prompt action to reduce the societal harms of alcohol use and to serve as a resource for a wide range of advocates supporting WHO's work to reduce the global burden of preventable diseases.

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Links
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