

## OPEN LETTER

May 2023

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus,  
Director-General,  
World Health Organization

Dear Dr Tedros,

Across the world, the most important thing is the health and wellbeing of our families and communities.

This is why the work that the World Health Organization (WHO) does to 'give everyone an equal chance at a safe and healthy life' is so vital.

Alcohol causes significant harm to so many people. Alcohol kills 3 million people globally, representing 5 per cent of all deaths. Alcohol also drives 5 per cent of all disease globally.

Among young adults aged 20 to 39 years, one in seven deaths are a result of alcohol. Alcohol is the greatest risk factor for disease burden among people aged 25 to 49 years.

This makes action to prevent and reduce alcohol harm vital to WHO ensuring that everyone has an equal chance at a safe and healthy life.

But alcohol companies and their lobby groups work relentlessly to undermine policies to prevent and reduce harm. They also work to undermine the health and safety of communities at the local level.

In Mexico, alcohol companies take millions of litres of water from drought ravaged communities to produce their beer, forcing communities to protest for the basic human right to access water. In Australia, the largest alcohol retailer fought for five years while they tried to build one of the biggest bottleshops in the country near a dry Aboriginal community in an area with high levels of alcohol harm, forcing the community to fight back. In Ireland, alcohol companies have lobbied at every step to undermine the Public Health Alcohol Action Act, watering down its impact and delaying many measures. In many African countries, multinational alcohol companies are deploying unethical practices to drive alcohol use, including using "beer promotion girls" and aggressive marketing that exposes children to alcohol promotions.

Right now, the WHO meets with the biggest global alcohol companies and their lobbyists formally once a year. These closed-door meetings are used by alcohol companies and their lobbyists to try to undermine health policy and programs at the global level.

This engagement needs to stop if we're going to prevent the significant harm that is caused by alcohol.

This is why we have come together as public health, community, family violence, children's rights and First Nations organisations to call on you as the leader of WHO to stop engaging with alcohol companies and their lobbyists.

Alcohol companies and their lobbyists should not have a seat at the table where policy and programs to progress community health, wellbeing and safety is being developed, assessed or evaluated.

The health, wellbeing and safety of our families and communities is far too important.

Yours sincerely,

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