

The Geneva Partnership on Alcohol

Towards a Global Charter

**THE GENEVA PARTNERSHIP ON ALCOHOL
TOWARDS A GLOBAL CHARTER**

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This document sets out general principles regarding the role of alcohol in society. It addresses individual and social responsibilities with respect to alcohol and its consumption. It acknowledges that beverage alcohol can confer pleasure and some benefits, but expresses concern over the severe negative consequences that alcohol consumption can have for individuals, communities and societies as a whole. It has been developed through a process of consultation with specialists from the alcohol industry, the field of public health and others involved in policy making. It sets forth an ambitious agenda for partnerships.

Preamble

There is a growing recognition of the importance of establishing stronger relations between the public and private sectors at the international level. In this context, ICAP¹ has taken the initiative to develop an agenda for partnership as a contribution to the global debate on alcohol policy. This document breaks new ground by identifying and promoting the complementary interests of the public health and scientific communities, the beverage alcohol industry, governments and the non-governmental sector. It builds upon the Dublin Principles² and acknowledges the efforts of international organizations to develop alcohol policy. In its preparation, which has involved an extensive process of consultation, including regional and global meetings, input has been sought from a wide range of people involved in alcohol policy development, with the objective of formulating general principles mutually acceptable to all parties.

Alcohol and Society

The drinking of beverage alcohol is and has been a part of many cultures throughout the world; however, the ill effects of inappropriate alcohol consumption are widely recognized. Beverage

1 The International Center for Alcohol Policies (ICAP) is a not-for-profit organization funded by 11 of the leading producers of beverage alcohol. ICAP is dedicated to helping reduce the abuse of alcohol worldwide and to promoting understanding of the role of alcohol in society through dialogue and partnerships involving the beverage alcohol industry, the public health community and others with an interest in alcohol policy.

2 The Dublin Principles of Cooperation Among the Beverage Alcohol Industry, Governments, Scientific Researchers, and the Public Health Community were adopted by consensus at the National College of Ireland, Dublin, on 28 May 1997.

alcohol is interwoven with many aspects of human life, including social interaction, celebration, ceremonial activities and religious rituals. In some cultures, drinking alcohol forms an integral part of daily living and is seen as food, while in other cultures, the consumption of beverage alcohol is forbidden or socially unacceptable.

All cultures and societies place restrictions on alcohol consumption, either by law or custom, varying from place to place. Under conditions of rapid social change, cultural norms and societal customs may become undermined by social disruption and economic changes and may not keep pace with changes in drinking patterns.

Public Policies

Public policies on beverage alcohol should be formulated by weighing the benefits derived from consuming beverage alcohol against the risks. Such policies should take account of the available scientific evidence. Where possible, policies should be developed and implemented in broad-based partnerships among the various government departments, those in public health, the beverage alcohol industry, representatives of consumers, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders. Laws and regulations regarding the sale and consumption of alcohol should be adopted and enforced, especially with respect to drinking and driving, illicit production and trade, sales to children and youth under the legally permitted age, and those who are intoxicated.

In taxing alcohol, governments should balance the wish of consumers to purchase beverage alcohol at reasonable cost with the need for tax revenue and the desire to discourage inappropriate drinking patterns.

Severe limitations on access, as well as high taxation, can result in unintended negative consequences, such as illicit production and consumption, adulteration and counterfeiting, smuggling and in some cases organized crime.

Access and Availability

Consumers should be able to obtain legally produced and marketed beverage alcohol. Access may be limited by laws, regulations and the standards that individuals, families, communities and the beverage alcohol industry impose upon themselves. Limitations on access should deter inappropriate drinking patterns, particularly where others are put at risk. Access to beverage alcohol should be limited for children and youth; the exact age for access in each country can only be decided by the local or national authorities.

In those societies, or sub-populations, in which new patterns of problematic drinking are emerging, or in which traditional wisdom on drinking may be poor or absent, a special focus should be placed on providing education, guidance and other initiatives on whether or how to drink.

Advertising and Promotion

Most countries regulate advertising for consumer products in general. It is recognized, however, that the advertising and promotion of beverage alcohol may need more careful regulation than that for some other products. Beverage alcohol companies, which commission advertising, have the primary responsibility of ensuring appropriate content and placement.

Beverage alcohol industry members should promote only the responsible consumption of their products and should not encourage irresponsible or inappropriate consumption. Advertising and promotional activities should not, for example, create an impression that the drinking of alcohol is a requirement for success, or present a negative portrayal of those who abstain; nor should they be targeted at children or those who do not have the legal right to buy or consume alcohol.

Regulatory bodies, which may involve the beverage alcohol industry, as well as effective self-regulatory standards within the industry, should govern beverage alcohol advertising, packaging and promotion. Where self-regulatory codes for advertising and promotion of alcohol beverages do not exist, the beverage alcohol industry should take steps to encourage their development and enforcement, especially in emerging markets. When self-regulation is shown not to be effective, governments should intervene with legislation or regulation.

Information and Education

People should have access to full and accurate information on the characteristics of beverages, including their alcohol content. Accurate information should also be available on the effects of drinking alcohol including the fact that effects may differ depending on the amounts consumed, patterns of consumption, the differing characteristics of consumers, and the circumstances under which consumption occurs. Those who provide such information, including governments, the beverage alcohol industry, the health sector, educators and the media, should present it in a clear, accurate and balanced manner. Individuals who choose to consume beverage alcohol should take into account information about related risks, harms and benefits.

Those involved in guiding and educating young people in life skills should teach them how to make informed decisions on whether and how to drink. Parents, guardians and other role models should set examples for responsible decision making about alcohol. Programs should be developed to assist parents and guardians to offer appropriate and effective guidance. Educational programs are needed for adults, including those in the workplace.

All key stakeholders (including producers and sellers, where permitted) have a social responsibility to be involved in information and education activities. Governments should ensure that frameworks are in place to develop and implement such programs.

Health Care

Based on scientific evidence, the health sector should provide education to the public about the harms associated with inappropriate consumption of alcohol and about appropriate patterns of drinking. The health sector should acknowledge the potential benefits of moderate alcohol consumption for those populations where this has been shown to be the case.

Special efforts should be directed at the education of health professionals. These efforts should enable professionals to help people recognize risky drinking patterns and guide their decisions. Health workers should be alert to any contribution drinking might have to an individual's health and, where necessary, arrange suitable interventions.

All levels of the health care system should be involved in the management, including rehabilitation, of problem drinkers and dependent individuals, as well as others who have suffered harm caused by drinking. These activities should include reducing the adverse consequences of intoxication, dependence and associated negative patterns of behavior, as well as promoting safer drinking patterns or where appropriate, abstinence. In the treatment of individuals with alcohol problems, including dependence, emphasis should be given to therapies of proven effectiveness.

Health workers should make use of community resources to support individuals and their families who have suffered from the effects of inappropriate alcohol consumption. The health sector's efforts should be strengthened through collaboration with other services including voluntary, welfare, law enforcement agencies and employers.

The beverage alcohol industry should support health sector initiatives through collaborative programs.

Responsible Service

Those who deal directly with consumers, including beverage alcohol retailers and the hospitality industry, should put in place responsible serving and selling practices. They should receive training in techniques for identifying and dealing with intoxicated individuals. Drinking environments which support moderate consumption should be encouraged. In establishments serving alcohol, non-alcoholic, and, where possible, low alcohol drinks, should be available at competitive prices as alternatives. Those who entertain privately should also make efforts to serve responsibly.

Ensuring Product Quality and Integrity

In order to protect consumers from adulterated or contaminated beverages, governments should adopt product quality standards and prevent illicit production and illegal trade. Beverage alcohol producers have a responsibility to ensure that their products meet high standards of quality and integrity.

Research and Dissemination of Results

There is a need for continuing basic and applied research about the harms and benefits associated with beverage alcohol. The beverage alcohol industry, governments, and non-governmental organizations should support independent scientific research which contributes to a better understanding of patterns of consumption and the relationships among alcohol, health and society. Funding sources should be acknowledged by researchers, and research results should be widely and fully disseminated.

Conclusion

Experience shows that with good will and effort, it is possible for key stakeholders to work together to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harm, while achieving individual objectives. The exchange of information and opinions involved in the development of this document has highlighted the substantial common ground that exists among stakeholders, and this useful dialogue should be continued.

PARTICIPANT TERMS OF REFERENCE:

All participants involved in the various stages of development of this document agree that the following terms of reference are an accurate reflection of the nature of their involvement.

- participants have been invited because of the unique contribution they can make as individuals, not as representatives of specific companies, organizations or institutions;
- participants have not been asked to formally endorse or act as signatories to this document, and participation should not be construed as endorsement;
- participants have engaged in the process leading up to and including the Geneva meeting in a spirit of open dialogue;
- participants believe that this document can help to create opportunities for greater involvement of all those with a legitimate interest in the development of alcohol policy at local, national and international levels.

PRÉCISIONS AU SUJET DES PARTICIPANTS:

Tous les participants impliqués dans les différentes étapes du développement de ce document sont d'accord sur le fait que les caractéristiques qui suivent sont le reflet exact de la nature de leur implication.

- Les participants ont été invités à cause de la contribution unique qu'ils pouvaient apporter en tant qu'individus et non pas en tant que représentants de compagnies, d'organisations ou d'institutions.
- Il n'a pas été demandé aux participants d'approuver ou d'agir en tant que signataires de ce document et leur participation ne devrait pas être interprétée comme une approbation.
- Les participants se sont joints à la préparation de la réunion de Genève dans un esprit d'ouverture.
- Les participants considèrent que ce document peut aider à créer les occasions d'une plus grande collaboration de tous ceux qui ont un intérêt véritable dans le développement d'une politique de l'alcool au niveau local, national ou international.

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