

Better informed consumers are key to decreasing alcohol-related harm

Written by Dan Mobley on 12 September 2016 in Thought Leader
Thought Leader

Better informed consumers are the key to decreasing alcohol-related harm, writes Dan Mobley.



Dan Mobley | *Photo credit: Diageo*

Before joining Diageo, I worked in India - a wonderful country which never ceased to surprise me. One of the most curious puzzles was, at the end of the day and seeking refreshment from Mumbai's heat, I could drink a Guinness on the terrace of a bar, but had to head inside to enjoy a gin and tonic.

This seemed peculiar given that India is the largest market in the world for spirits. The local licensing authorities seemed to view beer and wine almost as soft drinks but my favourite tipples of Tanqueray and Johnnie Walker were the "hard stuff" to be drunk only in hiding.

The myth that spirits are more harmful to health than beer or wine is similarly prevalent in Europe. Every EU member state applies a higher tax rate to spirits than to beer and wine, and many countries severely restrict the sale or advertising of spirits while granting greater freedom to beer and wine. This punitive discrimination against spirits is detrimental to consumers, national economies and public health.

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Alcohol is alcohol. There is no beverage of moderation, only a practice of moderation. A standard serving of whisky contains the same amount of pure alcohol as a standard measure of beer or wine and fewer calories. To protect people from harm, they need to know how much alcohol and how many calories their drink contains.

Informed consumers will make better choices if and when they choose to drink and alcohol producers, in partnership with governments, have a critical responsibility to provide this information.

Recent data from around Europe shows that many indicators of alcohol-related harm are decreasing, including a very welcome positive trend in underage drinking.

We at Diageo are proud of our work to reduce harmful drinking through education programs, information via our DrinkIQ website or training course, or our many campaigns to prevent drink-driving, underage drinking and drinking during pregnancy.

But nutrition and alcohol content information on labels is one of the best ways to ensure drinkers are able to make informed choices. Therefore we are redesigning our labels on a voluntary, global basis to include these elements per serving.

By next year, new bottles of Johnnie Walker Red Label, the best-selling Scotch whisky in the world, will reach the shelves with this on-pack information, ensuring consumers understand what's in their glass - they will immediately know that 30ml contains 10g of alcohol and 66 calories.

Alcohol labelling regulations are still fragmented, so we believe that it is our responsibility to be proactive and offer options that we feel will work well with consumers, such as establishing voluntarily a benchmark unit and understandable symbols.

We are excited by this change and hope consumers and EU policymakers will be too. We want to work with everyone who will help us shape a solution that best informs and protects European consumers, so hope you'll raise a glass with us to that.

About the author

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