

CAN CANCER WARNING MESSAGES INFLUENCE DRINKING INTENTIONS?

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Introduction and aim: Many drinkers are unaware of the cancer risk associated with alcohol consumption. Increasing awareness of this association via warning labels on alcohol products has the potential to allow more informed alcohol consumption decisions and to ultimately reduce overall intake levels. This study investigated the effects of a range of alcohol warning statements on drinkers' alcohol consumption intentions.

Design and methods: A sample of 2,168 Australian adult drinkers responded to a national online survey. Each respondent was exposed to one of six cancer warning statements, followed by questions relating to the believability, convincingness, and personal relevance of the statement. Respondents' current drinking behaviours and any changes in drinking intentions were also assessed.

Results: All six statements were effective in terms of the attitudinal (believability, convincingness, and personal relevance) and behavioural intentions measures. Positive effects were found among both the entire sample and the sub-sample of very heavy drinkers. Of the six statements tested, the warning relating to bowel cancer was most effective across all outcome measures.

Discussion and conclusions: The study results add to the limited evidence indicating that warning statements on alcohol products may assist drinkers to make more informed decisions and encourage more moderate consumption. The positive results for all six messages suggests that it would be feasible and appropriate to develop a suite of rotating messages to replicate the approach adopted in tobacco control. Similarly, warning statements on alcohol products should represent just one element of a comprehensive program of consumer education.

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