MEDIA RELEASE

CALLS FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGN TO CHALLENGE SOFT DRINK GIANTS’ TEEN MARKETING BINGE

Figures show soft drink consumption on the rise in under 25s

New figures from Roy Morgan Research have highlighted the growing younger market for soft drink with more 14-25 year olds consuming the sugar-laden drinks and in greater volumes over the past year.

According to the Rethink Sugary Drink coalition, young Australians are targeted relentlessly by big beverage companies, underlining the need to raise awareness of the amount of sugar in soft drink.

Chair of the Public Health Committee at Cancer Council Australia, Craig Sinclair, said while soft drink consumption has been declining among older age groups, people in their teens and early twenties are drinking larger quantities, more often.

“More than half (56%) of young Australians now drink soft drink at least once a week, up from 53% in 2013. And those who are drinking soft drink are consuming more of it – 14-25 year olds consumed an average of 6.2 glasses of soft drink per week, up from 5.7 glasses in 2013,” Mr Sinclair said.

“We know that the big soft drink giants are paying particular attention to their younger customers. Relentless targeting through price promotions on sugary, frozen drinks and gimmicks such as buy a Slurpee for three cents with another purchase are being used to entice young people.

“Coca Cola and other brands target young consumers in a variety of creative ways such as social media, outdoor and online advertising and through integrated marketing tactics such as sponsorships and endorsements. It’s very hard for young Australians to avoid this bombardment and it’s very hard for public health organisations to counter this with health information, given the sheer size of their advertising budgets.”

Kellie-Ann Jolly, the Heart Foundation’s National Spokesperson and Director of Cardiovascular Programs, Victoria, said soft drinks contain no nutritional value and have no place in schools, sport centres or other venues frequented by young people.

“For real impact we need to restrict the availability of soft drinks in schools and venues, where young people spend their time, and combine this with ongoing education about how sugary drinks can affect your health. Ultimately, we want to see water becoming the drink of choice for young people, with soft drinks consumed only occasionally,” said Ms Jolly.

The call for action comes as the World Health Organization (WHO) released its new recommendation that added sugars should not make up more than 10% of people’s daily energy, and ideally no more than 5% (or around 6 teaspoons of added sugar per day) for the biggest health benefit.

“When you consider a 600ml bottle of soft drink contains about 16 teaspoons of sugar – which is more than double the daily amount recommended by WHO – it’s easy to see how regular consumption can lead to a variety of health problems including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, kidney disease and tooth decay,” said Ms Jolly.

Dr Tim Mathew, National Medical Director at Kidney Health Australia, a Rethink Sugary Drink supporter, says regular soft drink consumption is a habit that young people need to break.

“Soft drinks are fuelling Australia’s obesity crisis – a leading risk factor for developing kidney disease. In many cases people innocently consume soft drinks, forgetting they are laden with sugar providing kilojoules that are very difficult to burn off. For young people, it’s very much a case of drink it now and pay for it later – they don’t often think about the consequences for their health.”
The Rethink Sugary Drink alliance is calling for:

- A public awareness campaign about the health impacts of soft drinks and the benefits of water.
- Tougher restrictions on the sale of soft drinks in schools and venues frequented by young people such as sports centres.

**About Rethink Sugary Drink:** Rethink Sugary Drink is a partnership between Cancer Council Australia, Diabetes Australia and Heart Foundation to raise awareness of the amount of sugar in sugar-sweetened beverages and encourage Australians to reduce their consumption. Rethink Sugary Drink is proudly supported by Australian Dental Association Inc, Nutrition Australia, National Stroke Foundation, Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO), Dental Health Services Victoria, Kidney Health Australia and the Obesity Policy Coalition. Visit [www.rethinksugarydrink.org.au](http://www.rethinksugarydrink.org.au) for more information.

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