

VICTORIAN TERTIARY ALCOHOL CAMPAIGN

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My name is Yuki Simmonds and I am a policy advisor in the Alcohol, Tobacco and Drug Policy Unit at the Department of Human Services in Victoria. Today I will be outlining the development and implementation of the Victorian Government's 'Tertiary Alcohol Campaign', which sought to raise awareness of the harms associated with excessive drinking among students attending either a University or a TAFE institution throughout Victoria.

As many of you will be aware, alcohol misuse is a significant problem to the Australian community – both socially and economically. The cost of alcohol misuse has been estimated to be \$4.7 billion per year, representing 24% of the total cost of drug abuse in Australia.

In addressing the harms associated with the misuse of alcohol in the community, the Victorian Government launched 'The Victorian Alcohol Strategy – Stage 1 Report' in June 2002. This strategy identified four key areas of alcohol-related concerns and issues that the Victorian Government wished to address. These four key areas were:

- Alcohol and young people;
- Promoting alcohol safe environments;
- Alcohol and violence; and
- The role of marketing of alcoholic beverages.

The strategy also outlined the proposals that the Victorian Government would implement to address these four key areas.

With regard to young people, there were two groups identified as demonstrating harmful drinking patterns. The first group were young people under the age of 18 years and the second group were people aged 18 – 25 years. Today I will just be focusing on the latter group, and more specifically, tertiary students.

People aged 18–25 years are a group whose drinking patterns are reported as being extremely harmful. For example, the 2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey found that weekly consumption of alcohol peaks among the 20-29 year age group, making them the most likely group to consume alcohol in a way that puts them at risk of long-term harm.

In addition, the Victorian Youth Alcohol Survey of 2002, which surveyed 1,500 young people aged 18-25 years, found that alcohol consumption was almost universal among this group, with 90% reporting they drank in the previous year. Most interesting though, the survey found a number of concerns regarding behaviours displayed by young people when under the influence of alcohol. For example:

- Over 13% of males and 7% of females reported creating a public disturbance whilst under the influence of alcohol;
- 29% of males and 19% of females reported verbally abusing somebody;

- 10% reported physically abusing someone while under the influence of alcohol; and
- 15% of males and 8% of females reported drink driving.

With regard to tertiary students, I think we have all heard and may have even experienced ourselves, the prevalence of alcohol at universities. A study of 400 students attending three of the major universities in Queensland found that 50% of males and 20% of females drank to the point of intoxication at least once a week. The survey also found that 69% of students drank at hazardous and harmful levels.

Therefore, to raise the awareness of the harms associated with drinking at hazardous levels among tertiary students, the Victorian Government developed and implemented a campaign targeting 18–25 year olds who either attended a Victorian university or TAFE institution. The aims of the campaign are to:

- Increase students' awareness and understanding of the harms associated with drinking;
- Reduce the harms associated with excessive drinking among students;
- Influence students' attitudes, decisions and behaviours around alcohol; and
- Reduce the consolidation of regular excessive drinking among students.

We are also seeking to increase their understanding and awareness of the services available to assist someone with an alcohol problem, and ways to access those services as part of this 'DirectLine', which the Victorian Government developed when they implemented the illicit drug campaign.

When we commenced the development of the 'Tertiary Alcohol Campaign', we first looked at previous campaigns that had been conducted in Australia and overseas to see what research had emerged. From this, we consolidated that drinking is part of the tertiary student experience, and that the student mindset is often characterised by intense experimentation, freedom, responsibility and the association of drinking with sex – and in general, having fun.

We also found that students do not necessarily think there is a need to decrease their alcohol consumption and they are quite happy going out and getting drunk three nights a week. They are not thinking of the long-term impact – what they are mostly concerned with is whether they can get up for class the next day. The research also indicated however that while students do not believe there is a need to decrease their alcohol consumption, they do report being receptive to messages and strategies around reducing alcohol consumption and are quite willing to listen to those messages that are targeted at them. The most effective strategies we identified for reaching students were those that provoked reflection and provided a balanced representation of the positive aspects to drinking versus the negative aspects.

We also conducted our own research with tertiary students, and we did this over two phases: in the first phase we tested 20 strategies, and in the second phase we refined the concepts and tested the language and layout. From this testing, we determined that students were not particularly concerned with the longer term harmful effects of excessive drinking and not really worried about the short term effects either – they

were more concerned about having a good time. Something interesting that was revealed in the research was the concern of students about looking pathetic or about being humiliated in front of their friends. Our research also found that students appreciate short and simple messages, which are clear and clever.

From the research, we came up with these campaign messages:

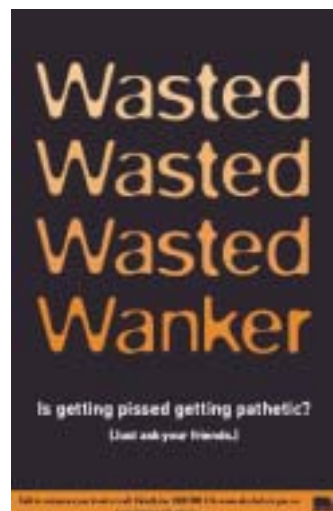
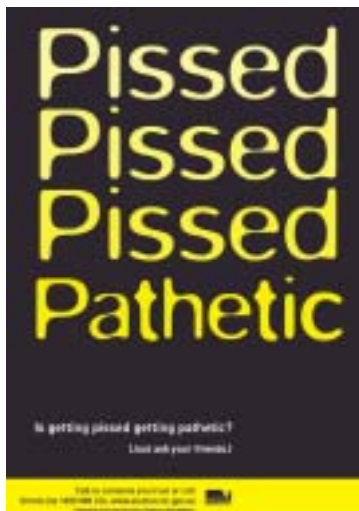
- Excessive drinking, repeatedly, can have a serious impact on the quality of relationships with friends; and
- There is information and assistance available through DirectLine and through the website, which was also developed as part of the campaign.

The main themes of these messages relates to the notion of repetitive and excessive drinking, which tertiary students are known to do regularly. Also, in our testing of the concepts, students indicated they would talk to someone if they felt that they had a problem with alcohol. In the first instance, they identified this person as being someone they could trust, whether it is a family member or a friend. They also indicated that, if they thought that the problem was serious enough, they might actually call an assistance hotline or go through the Internet to access services.

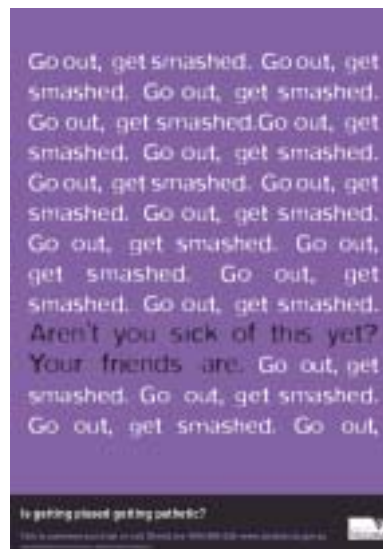
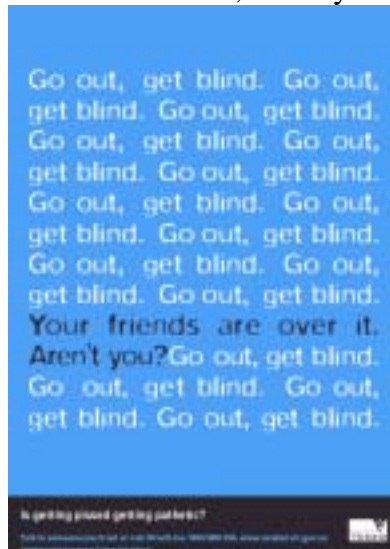
The campaign messages were then underpinned by the tagline “Is getting pissed getting pathetic? – Just ask your friends”. This was the most well received tagline of the ones that we tested, and we tested quite a few. Some of the others, such as “Get off, without getting wasted” and “Wasted again, where’s it getting you?” were reported as being cliché, gimmicky, and even a little parental. The tagline of “Is getting pissed getting pathetic – just ask your friends” was thought to be short and simple and as I said before played on notion of how excessive drinking may impact on other people, especially friends.

These are the first two concepts that we developed as part of the campaign (refers to screen). It uses words as images, and was found to be the most appealing to tertiary students. They reported that it spoke to them as mature adults and allowed them to interpret the executions themselves. It was also found that these executions resulted in students thinking twice about their drinking behaviours.

The first concept, “pissed pathetic”, was placed in transport shelters around tertiary institutions, and the “wasted wanker” concept was placed in venues, such as in the bathroom facilities of pubs and bars around tertiary institutions.



These are another two concepts we developed as part of the campaign, again playing on the notion of repetitive excessive drinking and the impact it can have on your friends, with lines such as “Aren’t you sick of this yet? – Your friends are!” or “Your friends are over it, aren’t you?”



We realised the difficulties in reaching this target audience so we placed the concepts in places where students would be exposed to the messages quite regularly – including the outdoor advertisements in transport shelters, in-venue advertising such as in bathroom facilities of pubs and bars as well as in common rooms of Union buildings. We also had Internet banners that were advertised on commonly used sites like hotmail. The in-venue advertising is probably the biggest component of the campaign due to students being exposed to the campaign messages while they are actually partaking in the problem behaviour.

We also developed related items including a standard drinks glass –a 400ml cup that outlined the drinking guidelines on it, as per the Australian Drinking Guidelines. Takeaway cards were developed to coincide with the in-venue campaign, which detailed tips on drinking safely and tips to reduce the harms associated with drinking.

In terms of the distribution of the campaign materials, while it was placed in transport shelters and in venues, we also distributed the posters, standard drink glasses and the takeaway cards to all Victorian universities and TAFEs, including halls of residence where obviously a lot of drinking takes place. Alcohol and drug treatment services also received the campaign materials.

We have implemented the campaign over two phases. We launched the campaign last July and it will end at the end of this July. It was originally only meant to run for six months but we received such a positive response from the community and from students that we extended it for another six months. We also felt that in undertaking the campaign in January/ February when the academic year commences we would be targeting first year students who have just come out of high school.

The campaign is currently being evaluated by Deakin University, and they are evaluating over four phases, which commenced when we first began the campaign in July last year. They have been evaluating the advertisements placed in the transport shelters, as well as the in-venue advertising, in both regional and metro areas of Victoria.

As the evaluation has not finished, I cannot really offer you too many concrete findings regarding the success of the campaign, but preliminary findings have found at this stage that 61% of the students are aware of the campaign and of the concepts, 84-85% have stated the messages are relevant, and 80% have stated the messages are realistic. That has been quite a positive result for us, considering that the campaign is probably the first in Victoria to target students of this age group. Once the evaluation is finalised, it will assist in informing what should be done in the future with regard to future campaigns and whether we need to continue targeting tertiary students.

I think it is also really important for us to state that when we first developed this campaign, we did not intend to change drinking behaviours. Because it is the first campaign of its kind in Victoria, it was more about raising awareness of the harms associated with drinking. Therefore, in undertaking the evaluation, Deakin University have not sought to determine whether student drinking has increased or decreased, but rather how they have rated the messages, what they have taken from the campaign, and whether it has made them reflect on their own drinking behaviours.

If anyone would like the results of the evaluation, they can come and see me afterwards and I'll be happy to distribute these as of July – and also if anyone would like to receive copies of the concepts, the takeaway cards or the standard drink glasses.