

Principles of the Alcohol Policy Network Europe (APN) on the role of the alcohol industry and its partners in alcohol policy making.

After discussions and consultations on the subject the APN makes the following principal observations:

1. There are inevitable conflicts of interest between the economic objectives of the industry and the health and welfare of the public. This has important implications for developing public policies to reduce alcohol harm.
2. Important guidance on this subject is contained also in a letter by Dr Chan, DG of WHO to the BMJ where she says "In the view of WHO the alcohol industry has no role in the formulation of alcohol policies, which must be protected from distortion by commercial or vested interests" (BMJ 2013, 346:f1889). Their role should be restricted to implementing public health oriented alcohol policies in relation to their core business as producers, distributors, marketers and retailers of alcohol products.
3. The APN is well aware of numerous occasions on which the industry and its partners have been intervening in alcohol policy development processes so as to protect and advance their economic objectives in conflict with public health and welfare.
4. The APN is also aware of occasions on which potentially detrimental effects of industry actions on public health have been effectively addressed by the public health community, including NGOs. Such efforts require both research evidence and strong alliances to support the arguments of public health advocates in work with policy makers.
5. Cooperation by public health institutions with alcohol industry corporate social responsibility activities threatens the credibility and the reputation of those public health institutions and will help legitimize inappropriate efforts by the industry, and possibly undermine public health goals.
6. As part of their corporate social responsibility the industry should invest in responsible practices related to its core role as producers, distributors, marketers and retailers of alcohol. Such activities could include e.g provision of consumer information on products that is endorsed by independent expertise, abstaining from marketing efforts that target at-risk groups such as young people, and reducing the alcohol content of products where appropriate. It is commendable for public health oriented agencies to be involved in monitoring and evaluation of such activities.

Given the different practices of alcohol policy and strategy development in which countries and communities find themselves, and given the differences in availability of public health oriented alcohol policy expertise, it may be necessary to develop a repertoire of different strategies to preserve the integrity of alcohol policy development from interference by alcohol industry bodies.

APN is therefore calling on its members and other institutions which have an interest in promoting public health oriented alcohol policies to take into account the issues raised here above, with a view to assisting the development of further guidance for policy makers which is based on international experience, and which can be applied at national and other levels. APN intends to provide further guidance on this subject in a more detailed position paper based on the principles outlined here above.

Ljubljana, 23 November 2016.