

30 April 2026

Ms Nerida O'Loughlin PSM
Australian Communications and Media Authority
Australian Government
PO Box 78
Belconnen ACT 2616

Dear ACMA Chair, Ms Nerida O'Loughlin PSM

RE: Review of alcohol advertising rules in the Free TV Code

The National Rural Health Alliance (the Alliance) thanks the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) for the opportunity to provide feedback on the **Review of alcohol advertising rules in the Free TV Code** consultation.

The Alliance is the peak advocacy body for rural health, representing [56 Member Organisations](#), representing a broad stakeholder group, including health professional organisations, health and aged care service providers, educators and researchers, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health sector and students. This diversity grants the Alliance a unique vantage point for analysing Australia's healthcare system across the continuum of care.

Australians living in rural, regional and remote areas (hereafter rural) represent approximately one-third of Australia's total population, or 7.4 million people. Despite representing a large cohort, which is responsible for generating over 70% of Australia's exports, almost half of Australia's tourism revenue and producing 90% of the food consumed in Australia, rural communities face poorer health outcomes (see [NRHA's Rural Health in Australia 2025 Snapshot](#)).

The risks of elevated alcohol consumption in rural areas are well established. Australians living in *Remote* and *Very Remote* and *Outer Regional* areas are 1.4 times more likely to engage in risky drinking compared to those living in *Major Cities*.¹ The rate of alcohol-related hospitalisations is also highest in *Remote* and *Very Remote* areas. This elevated alcohol consumption also correlates with higher rates of injury and hospitalisation. Areas with the ABS classification of *Very Remote* had the highest rates of alcohol-related injury hospitalisations in the country, equating to over eight times the national rate and almost 11 times the rate for people living in *Major Cities* (see NRHA's [Alcohol, smoking, vaping and other drug use in rural Australia Fact Sheet](#) for further details).

¹ The Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Structure classifies Australia into five categories: *Major Cities*, *Inner Regional*, *Outer Regional*, *Remote* and *Very Remote*. These categories are based on relative geographic remoteness, which is objectively measured using the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia Plus (ARIA+). For further details, [please refer to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Remoteness Areas](#)

In rural Australia, these elevated alcohol use risks also occur within the context of a strong sporting culture. In 2024, it was estimated that people living in *Remote* or *Very Remote* areas represented the highest percentage of Australians aged fifteen years and over participating in sport-related activities at least once a week (29%), followed by *Major Cities* (28%) and *Outer Regional* areas (27%). Additionally, the highest percentage of Australians aged fifteen years and over participating in a non-playing role (including coaching, medical support, fundraising, administration) is in *Remote* or *Very Remote* communities (20%), followed by *Outer Regional* (15%) with the lowest participation being in *Major Cities* and *Inner Regional* areas (both 14%) (see Clearinghouse for Sport's [Evidence Base for Sport: Sport in Rural and Regional Australia](#)).

A recent study that explored the correlation between alcohol advertising during sporting events in Australia and alcohol consumption inclination found that, while alcohol advertisements occurred at a rate of 1 in 20 advertisements, they elicited a low yet measurable increase in alcohol consumption inclination for people who are considered risky drinkers (see [Hollett et al. 2025](#)).

This is of great concern for the Alliance as this study demonstrates the correlation between alcohol advertising and elevated intention to consume alcohol for people who are risky drinkers. As established in the earlier data, rural Australians are a vulnerable population particularly in the context of alcohol consumption. This translates into a higher risk for alcohol advertising influencing harmful alcohol usage in rural Australians, who due to geographic isolation, often find it more difficult to seek help for problematic substance use due to limited service availability. Considering this research, and the overwhelming data of higher rates of alcohol related harms in rural Australia, the Alliance calls for intervention and stricter regulation regarding alcohol advertising during televised sporting events.

The Alliance has historically been a strong advocate for improved outcomes related to alcohol and other drug usage in rural Australia and has supported many organisations, including the Country Women's Association of Australia (CWAA) in creating meaningful change (see DrinkTank's article [CWAA takes stand against alcohol harm in rural Australia](#)). More recently, the Alliance presented evidence to the Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Disability's [Inquiry into the Health Impacts of Alcohol and Other Drug Use in Australia](#). In addition, the Alliance has also published the [Alcohol, smoking, vaping and other drug use in rural Australia Fact Sheet](#) as a resource to raise awareness to the higher rates of substance use and related harm in rural areas. While these submissions and resources have a health focus, the Alliance believes that they will be of value to the ACMA in undertaking the review of alcohol advertising rules in the Free TV Code and provide important contextual information. Due to this ongoing focus, as well as the strong connection the Alliance has with its membership and rural communities, the Alliance would be happy to provide any further information or support to ACMA that would assist during this review.

Yours sincerely



Margaret Deerain
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