

AODCCC Opinion Piece

Rethinking Alcohol's Place in Sporting Venues

Sport is more than a pastime in Western Australia, it is a cornerstone of identity, community connection, and collective pride. From the roar of packed stadiums to the quiet dedication of early-morning training sessions, sport has the potential to bring together people of all ages, backgrounds, and regions. Its influence extends far beyond elite competition, strengthening physical and mental health, supporting local economies, and fostering social cohesion. Sport inspires our children and youth, it celebrates the extraordinary potential of the human body and mind, and unites us around the values of effort, teamwork, and resilience. It is woven into the fabric of Australian life, creating a sense of belonging that transcends social and cultural differences.

Given sport's unique role in shaping our values, communities, and future generations, why does alcohol, one of Australia's most harmful drugs, occupy such a privileged place in Australian sporting culture? After all, there was a time when tobacco sponsorship and cigarette advertising were also considered a normal part of sport.

Sport Infused with Alcohol at our Fingertips

Search for any major sporting event then ask yourself this simple question, *when does alcohol appear?* Whether it's football, cricket, rugby, soccer, tennis, golf, motorsport, basketball to name just a few, alcohol brands are rarely far from view because today, alcohol companies and sponsorships connect to athletes, teams, events, venues and stadiums.

“Why are alcohol brands given such prominent positions at sporting events, using the credibility of elite athletes to market products that contradict everything those athletes represent?” - AODCCC Reference group member.

With just a few taps on a smartphone, search engines and social media platforms deliver marketing content, advertising, product promotions, and brand messaging within seconds. Increasingly, sophisticated algorithms are used to target consumers of all ages with personalised content that reinforces commercial interests. Marketing simply presents alcohol and sport as natural partners, embedding alcohol brands within the identities of revered athletes, teams, events, venues, and fan experiences. In doing so, this normalises the relationship between alcohol and sport whilst downplaying [potential for harm](#).

Alcohol sponsorship impact reaches far beyond stadiums and broadcasts. Today the multimillion-dollar alcohol industry employs immersive brand experiences, which includes live activations, and augmented virtual reality content to capitalise on our passion for sporting teams and athletes.

“Alcohol is very visible at the stadium with signage; our children are watching the adults and will emulate them” - AODCCC Member, former Allied Health Professional.

We are also witnessing the rise of [Alibi marketing](#), [Surrogate marketing](#) and [Brand sharing](#) which are all persuasive strategies which allow alcohol companies to promote their brands without explicitly advertising alcoholic products. For instance, by marketing a low alcoholic variant that closely mirrors branding of their full-strength counterparts’ profit driven companies sustain brand visibility and consumer recognition even in environments where advertising is legally restricted.

“People are not always distinguishing between 0% alcohol brands. We see the brand. So, when harms and implications are the same, why aren’t they expected to follow the same marketing restrictions as alcohol” - AODCCC Member, daughter.

Throughout sport, the alcohol industry has embedded itself into cultural experiences by reinforcing the perception that drinking alcohol is safely managed, normalised and an expected part of sporting social life. For decades, sporting events have attracted large and diverse sport loving audiences. These sporting spectacles are emotionally charged, appeal across multiple generations, and strongly associate sport with success, celebration, identity and social connection. As a result, the financial and cultural ties between alcohol and sport have become deeply entrenched. AODCCC therefore believes meaningful policy actions to restrict [alcohol sponsorship](#) are unlikely to happen or improve unless there is stronger public awareness, and greater support for change.

“We’ve stopped going to the football because it (alcohol) causes aggressive behaviour in the crowd which puts me on edge” - AODCCC Member, Father of teenage boys.

Alcohol sponsorship continues to pervasively build brands, win market share and generate profit within major Australian sporting codes. In 2026, the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) found that all AFL clubs advertise alcohol brands at stadiums during matches, while all AFL and NRL clubs [promote alcohol brands through their digital channels](#). This is not limited to AFL and NRL. Alcohol brands are embedded across multiple sporting codes and events, reinforcing the association between sport, celebration, and drinking. In tennis, the Australian Open, for example

holds multimillion dollar sponsorship agreements that [position alcohol products prominently](#) throughout the event, including stadiums signage, advertising banners, naming rights, hospitality areas, and courtside sales via bars and vendor kiosks.

Together, these are just a few examples demonstrating how alcohol marketing continues to evolve and adapt, maintaining a powerful presence in sporting environments despite government efforts to reduce alcohol related harm.

***“We’ve got both men’s and women’s teams sponsored by alcohol products, and family domestic violence where alcohol is present is significantly higher during finals season, I just find this insane. How are we not more progressive than this?”
- AODCCC member, mother, carer affected by partners drinking.***

Alcohol policy relating to sporting venues is being discussed as though the stadium entry gates and fence lines are the edge of its consequences. Yet individuals, families, carers, academics, workers and professionals across health, community services, education, the public sector, and alcohol and other drug services consistently tell us that the effects of alcohol consumption at sporting events do not remain confined to the stadium. The impact of alcohol consumption shows up on the drive home, on public transport, in health and emergency departments, in our workplaces, our clubs, is felt within schools and our family homes.

Many of us may never have read the *Liquor Control Act 1988* which shapes decisions about the availability of alcohol in our sporting communities. For instance, if a hospitality company wants to increase alcohol sales beyond what its licence currently permits, under the Act it must apply (as an applicant) to the regulator, the Department of Local Government, Industry Regulation and Safety. The regulator then considers the application, supporting documents, and any public submissions before deciding whether to approve, conditionally approve, or refuse the request. Applicants with a commercial stake in the outcome can easily overlook or marginalise evidence from people with lived and living experience of alcohol-related harm. Rather than focusing on the broader social impacts of increased alcohol availability, applications often highlight customer experience, convenience, operational efficiency, and economic benefits whilst giving less consideration to the individuals, families, carers, workers, and those who live with the consequences of existing alcohol-related harm.

The AODCCC believes this is why lived and living experience participation and voices matter. Decisions about alcohol availability are not simply administrative processes. They shape the environments in which families gather, children participate, and communities celebrate sport. Our question is not whether industry development should occur, it’s whether commercial interests are being balanced appropriately against the Act’s commitment to minimise alcohol-related harm and protect the wellbeing of the wider community.

“Just look at the alcohol industry-funded DrinkWise slogan, “Drink Responsibly,” so subtle in its framing. An implicit message given that drinking alcohol is normal and a responsible activity, whilst shifting our attention away from industries role in producing, marketing, promoting, and selling alcohol. Instead, industry suggests the alcohol related harm impacting our children and family is only due to an individual who fails to drink responsibly.” - AODCCC Family and Carer reference group member.

The AODCCC undertakes [Systemic Advocacy](#) to amplify the voices of consumers, families, and communities affected by alcohol and other drug-related harms. As part of this work, we continue to challenge the normalisation of alcohol in Australian sport and question policies that prioritise industry growth over community wellbeing.

We have repeatedly:

- Reminded the WA Government its role is to maximise community wellbeing and safety, not maximise alcohol sales.
- Stated that when economic interests and alcohol-related harm come into conflict, public policy decision making should put community wellbeing and safety first.
- Warned that making alcohol easier to obtain would likely increase consumption and associated harms, whilst challenging the assumption that more alcohol access at sporting venues is inherently beneficial simply because it creates business opportunities.
- Called for our government, leadership and regulators to strengthen safeguards, which reduce alcohol-related harm for all community.
- Maintained that alcohol policy should not be developed solely by industry, regulators and political experts. Instead, alcohol policy decisions must also be informed by consumers, families, carers and communities with direct lived and living experience of alcohol-related harm.

“Our children have already been harmed by alcohol, it’s all about profit for commercial gain.” - AODCCC Member, Grandparent.

Profit driven corporations are increasingly rebranding and intensifying alcohol exposure within commercial movements, framing alcohol as a factor for improved customer experience, event delivery, and venue operations. Alongside this, we see repeated applications for licensing to be amended to expand beyond the legal limits originally approved. For example, proposals to remove the 3.5% ethanol cap on beer, and to

increase the number of alcohol sales outlets in an area. These are not neutral operational adjustments, rather deliberate attempts to increase alcohol availability and sales.

While licensing decisions are subject to assessment and public submissions under the *Liquor Control Act 1988*, the recurring nature of these applications raises broader questions about whether regulatory decisions are reinforcing harm minimisation objectives or gradually normalising greater alcohol availability in Australian sport settings. Applicants may request minor administrative changes, however, these changes shape the kind of public spaces our stadiums become and influence who feels safe within them. When one venue's expansion of alcohol availability is used to justify another's, exceptions can quickly become norms. Alcohol is a regulated drug, precisely because its availability has consequences which the market doesn't price in.

Two examples illustrate this concern:

1. [Optus Stadium](#): AODCCC members raised concerns that replacing mid-strength beer with full-strength beer could increase antisocial behaviour, transport-related risks, and challenges for Responsible Service of Alcohol.
2. [Perth Rectangle Stadium](#): The vender's application to expand alcohol availability pivoted on Optus Stadium as a comparable venue, despite the Optus decision occurring without the same level of public scrutiny.

The AODCCC's ongoing consultations with people who have lived and living experience of alcohol-related harm, consistently highlight the same concerns; that intoxication and antisocial behaviour are already present at these events; and that increasing alcohol strength and availability is likely to intensify existing problems.

Western Australian families, children, and non-drinkers attending sporting events which are promoted as family-friendly events, should not have their safety and enjoyment diminished by increasingly alcohol-focused environments. Hopefully, future generations will remember sport for the passion, connection and unforgettable moments created on the field, court, oval and pitch, rather than for the alcohol-related harms that too often surround it.



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