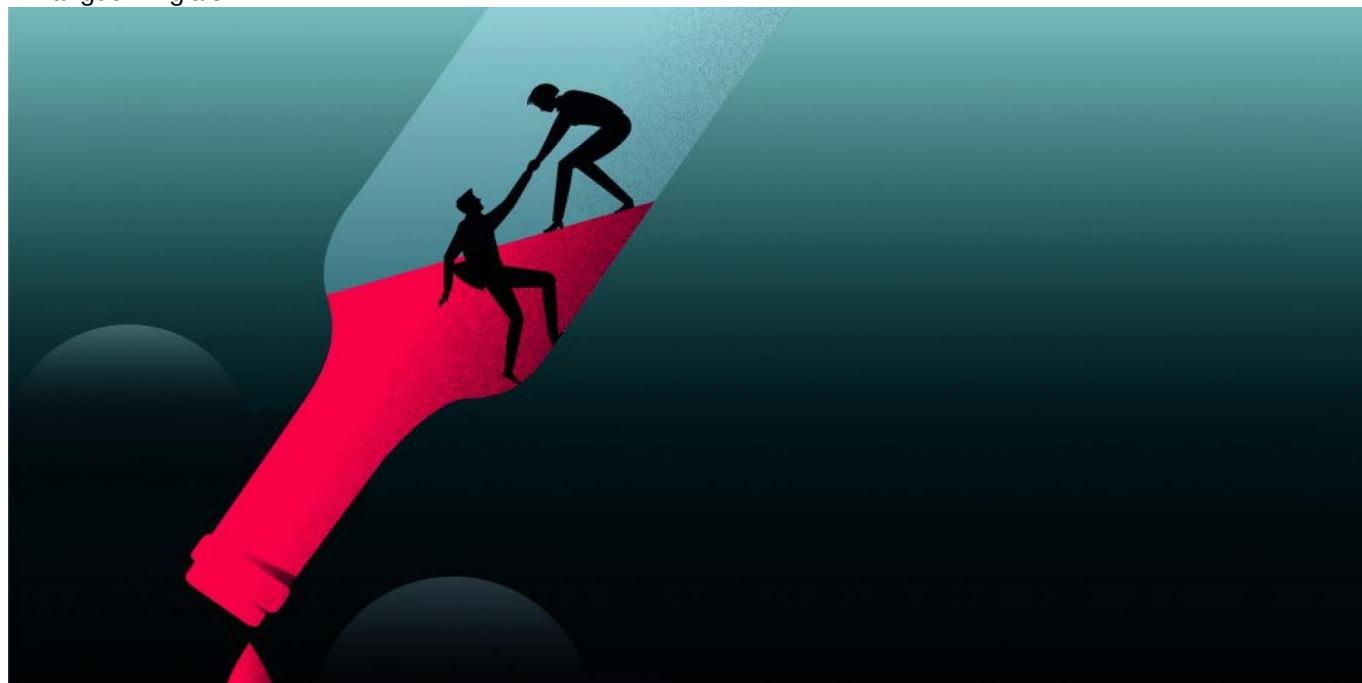


New report exposes growing influence of the alcohol industry in the Latin America and Caribbean region

Langue Anglais



Alcohol industry also proactively leveraging the COVID-19 pandemic under the guise of Corporate Social Responsibility

Thursday, 27 August, 2020 (Mexico City, Mexico)--The rapidly growing disabilities and death arising from the harmful use of alcohol in the Latin America and the Caribbean Region (LAC) is a direct result of a series of deliberate tactics by the alcohol industry to influence and undermine government policy aimed at regulating the marketing, advertising and sale of alcohol at safe levels a new report has revealed.

[The Alcohol industry's Commercial and political Activities in Latin America and the Caribbean: Implications for Public Health](#) [1] was released today by four civil society organisations working in the noncommunicable disease sector: the NCD Alliance (NCDA), the Global Alcohol Policy Alliance (GAPA), the Healthy Latin America Coalition (CLAS), and the Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC).

The report describes the role of the alcohol industry in influencing regional policies that affect public health and social welfare, using tactics that resemble those of other unhealthy commodity industries such as ultra-processed food, sugar-sweetened beverage, and tobacco, which are far more frequently exposed and challenged in LAC.

"This report shows how the alcohol industry works in tandem to oppose effective alcohol policies and actively engage in strategic practices that compromise public health in the region", said Professor Thomas Babor of the University of Connecticut School of Medicine and a lead author. It provides evidence and analysis of how health policy is undermined by vested interests, most recently in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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This report is sounding the alarm bells - the alcohol industry is moving into fertile ground in the Latin America and the Caribbean," said Katie Bain, CEO of the NCD Alliance.

to bolster their future profits, relying heavily on advertising and other marketing efforts to ease their expansion into these emerging markets."

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Urgent action is needed across the region if we are to put a brake on the industry’s relentless leveraging of the tourist industry as an entry point to the Caribbean’s small island developing states, said **Sir Trevor Hassel**, President of the Healthy Caribbean Coalition

Alcohol consumption is particularly high in Latin America and the Caribbean countries and territories (LAC).

According to Global Health Observatory, Latin America’s consumption of 6.5 liters of pure alcohol annually per capita makes it the third highest region in the world, after Europe at 10.1 and North America at 9.9 litres.

However some countries within the region, such as Grenada and Saint Lucia, are higher at 9.5 and 10.6, respectively (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). Total adult per capita consumption in Central and South America has increased over the past 40 years. In Brazil, which ranks among the largest beer producers worldwide, consumption has almost tripled since the 1960s.

Rising rates of alcohol consumption, as well as binge drinking patterns among young people have contributed to the increasing burden of disease and injuries in Latin America and the Caribbean. **The harmful use of alcohol is a leading risk factor for death and disability in the LAC Region**, particularly among males (Pan American Health Organization, 2015). Alcohol use is the leading risk factor for disability-adjusted life-years among men in Latin America ([Degenhardt, Charlson, Ferrari, Satomauro et al., 2018](#) [2]).

The activities of the industry that have implications for public health were found to be diverse, multifaceted, and widespread in the LAC region. Commercial activities include the concentration of ownership of alcohol brands and products by a small number of transnational alcohol corporations, and use of sophisticated marketing techniques to target adolescents and other vulnerable groups. Strategies include information campaigns to achieve strategic objectives, constituency building, substituting ineffective for effective policies, using financial measures to influence favorable policies, and legal action. **Tactics such as lobbying, image advertising, building strategic alliances, and litigation in the courts are used to influence industry-favorable policies in four key areas:** alcohol availability, alcohol pricing and taxes, marketing regulations, and drink-driving countermeasures.

"Almost every country in Latin America and the Caribbean has been exposed to some of these tactics," said **Beatriz Champagne**, Coordinator of the Healthy Latin America Coalition. "Far from being a passive supplier of alcohol products, the industry is actively involved in promoting demand for alcohol in order to increase sales and profits, particularly in new market segments like women and young adults."

This [report](#) [3] provides strong evidence that the influence of the large transnational alcohol corporations on the policy environment is manifested through a network of major producers, proxy organizations and affiliated interest groups.

Using strategies and tactics borrowed from the tobacco industry, public health measures have been difficult to implement even when there is strong scientific evidence of their effectiveness in reducing alcohol-related harm.

"For want of better alcohol policy, thousands of premature deaths and millions of disability-free life years lost could have been prevented but for the negative influence of the alcohol industry in LAC," said **Øystein Bakke**, Secretary of the Global Alcohol Policy Alliance (GAPA). "The alcohol industry’s activities in the Region are compromising the work of public health community, the World Health Organization, and the NGOs working in the public health area to deal with the burden of disease attributable to alcohol."

The report also highlights how some of the biggest players in the alcohol industry have proactively leveraged the COVID-19 pandemic under the guise of Corporate Social Responsibility, citing the production and donation of alcohol-based hand sanitizers AB inBev and the provision by Mexico’s Grupo Modelo and Paraguay’s Cervepa of a free online ordering platform for home delivery services to more than 12,000 retailers.

Partnerships with other transnational corporations, especially the ultra processed food industry became commonplace in the pandemic. One example was "Movimiento nós" (Movement us) that united eight corporations (including Ambev, Heineken, Coca-Cola and Pepsico) to assist 300,000 small retail stores in Brazil during the pandemic including the

facilitating payment conditions and providing economic and COVID-related information.

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Further information:

Michael Kessler

NCD Alliance Media Relations

Mob: +34 655 792 699

Email: michael.kessler@inton-media.com [4]

About the [NCD Alliance](#) [5]

The NCD Alliance (NCDA) is a unique civil society network of 2,000 organisations in 170 countries, dedicated to improving NCD prevention and control worldwide. Our network includes NCDA members, national and regional NCD alliances, scientific and professional associations, and academic and research institutions. Together with strategic partners, including WHO, the UN and governments, NCDA is transforming the global fight against NCDs.

About the [Healthy Caribbean Coalition](#) [6]

HCC's mission is to harness the power of civil society, in collaboration with government, academia, and international partners, and private enterprise as appropriate, in the development and implementation of plans for the prevention and management of chronic diseases among Caribbean people.

About the [Healthy Latin America Coalition](#) [7]

CLAS is an alliance of more than 300 non-governmental organizations in Latin America whose purpose is to prevent and control non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in this region. Founded in March 2011, it is aimed at reducing inequality, promoting human rights, and promoting effective policies with an impact on the risk factors and determinants of NCD. CLAS is an initiative of the InterAmerican Heart Foundation.

About [GAPA](#) [8]

GAPA is a public health network that share information on alcohol issues and advocate for evidence-based alcohol policies, free from commercial interests. Networks affiliated to GAPA operate in Africa, European Union, South America, Caribbean, South East Asia, USA and Western Pacific regions.

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[2] [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366\(18\)30337-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366(18)30337-7/fulltext)

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[4] <mailto:michael.kessler@intoon-media.com>

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[6] <https://www.healthycaribbean.org/about-the-healthy-caribbean-coalition/>

[7] <https://interamericanheart.org/healthy-latin-america-coalition-registration-form/>

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