



THE UNIVERSITY  
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*An analysis of Australian print and television media coverage of the public health message 'alcohol causes cancer'*

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Alcohol is a class-1 carcinogen and is a modifiable risk factor for cancer, but public awareness of the link remains low. News media is a common and accessible source of health information in Australia, and influences public opinion and policy agenda. It is important to analyse how the *alcohol causes cancer* message is re-presented, as this may inform public health advocacy and identify needs and potential strategies for raising awareness through health promotion. This is the first study to compare both print and broadcast news media within this context.

**Methods:** 1502 print articles and 96 broadcast stories published in Australia between 2005 and 2013 were located through the Factiva and Australian Health News Research Collaboration databases. Summative content analysis and descriptive statistics were used to examine the prominence and content of all stories. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes and frames within stories that focused on the link between alcohol and cancer.

### **Results:**

**CONTENT:** Most print articles were published within the main/first section of the newspaper, with half on odd pages. 95% of articles included the claim that alcohol is carcinogenic, with 5% suggesting it was either non-carcinogenic or preventative for cancer, and 1% including discussion of both. Over time, the ratio of carcinogenic to non-carcinogenic/preventative articles increased. Half of the print database consisted of stories that had been repeated. Most commonly, articles cited 'alcohol' as a generic descriptor while mentioning a specific type of cancer. Organisations connected to cancer were the most frequent authority source mentioned within both sets of data. In the broadcast data, stories most commonly appeared on evening news programs. 95% of the stories stated that alcohol causes cancer, with 5% suggesting alcohol is both carcinogenic and non-carcinogenic. More than half of the broadcast stories were repeated stories.

**THEMATIC:** The *alcohol causes cancer* message was often framed as shocking. Connections were made between alcohol and cigarettes as both a consumable, and a public health concern. The evidence for the link between alcohol and cancer was framed as either convincing or insufficient, with differing implications drawn regarding the roles and responsibilities of health authorities.

**Conclusion:** Information regarding the link between alcohol and cancer is available within the Australian media, but is often obscured by discussion of other health issues. Improved collaboration between health promoting organisations and journalists may facilitate greater accuracy and prominence of the *alcohol causes cancer* message.

## Disclaimer

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I give permission for my thesis to be reproduced and submitted to academic staff for the purpose of assessment.

Signed,

Joshua McDonough,

November, 2016

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## List of Abbreviations

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<b>ABC</b>	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
<b>AICR</b>	American Institute of Cancer Research
<b>AHNRC</b>	Australian Health News Research Collaboration
<b>CSIRO</b>	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
<b>HPV</b>	Human Papilloma Virus
<b>NHMRC</b>	National Health and Medical Research Council
<b>NSW</b>	New South Wales
<b>PRISMA</b>	Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses
<b>SA</b>	South Australia
<b>SBS</b>	Special Broadcasting Service
<b>WA</b>	Western Australia
<b>WCRF</b>	World Cancer Research Fund
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation

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