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SPARKING CHANGE

A Newsletter from Alcohol Forum Ireland

SUPPORTING INDEPENDENCE FROM ALCOHOL INDUSTRY INFLUENCE

With Introduction from Professor
Thomas Babor



i-mark

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During its brief history of development and implementation, i-Mark has attracted considerable attention, not just in Ireland, but also in other parts of the world.

Particular interest has been shown by organizations and individuals who recognize the alcohol industry as a significant contributor to disease, disability and death throughout the world. Independence from the alcohol industry, the hallmark of i-Mark's toolkit and training package, is an idea whose time has come.

For too long the alcohol industry has been the "elephant in the room," always there to help the young and the old to enjoy their products "responsibly."

The only problem with this deceptive self-portrait is that the alcohol industry is not just in the business of satisfying consumer demand, it is also in the business of creating lifetime customers for its products.

The marketing of alcohol is driven by profit, and most of that profit comes at the expense of alcoholics, problem drinkers, underage consumers and a variety of other vulnerable groups.

"i-Mark: An idea whose time has come"

Alcohol has now been recognized as one of the main contributors to mortality and morbidity globally. That recognition poses a direct threat to the industry's image and its profits.



For this reason, the friendly, albeit unobtrusive elephant has been throwing its weight around in recent years in order to avoid the mistakes of the tobacco industry, which for many years was very adept at corrupting the scientific establishment to create doubt about tobacco's harm to the smoker and to others, and to avoid regulation of the leading preventable cause of cancer and heart disease. Big Alcohol has been following the same playbook.

Research has now revealed how effective they have been in applying the same tactics: shaping the evidence base by funding biased scientists and by issuing biased technical reports; forming alliances with civil society organizations to promote ineffective policies and burnish their public image; creating public relations organizations to promote self-regulation and weak policy alternatives; using litigation and circumvention to avoid taxes and regulation; and influencing alcohol policy through political contributions and lobbying.

Because of its influence and economic power, global health is being threatened as never before by a coalition of transnational corporations capable of acting in concert to expand their operations into every corner of the world. Although the industry may appear to many as the friendly elephant always ready to promote "responsible drinking" and corporate philanthropy, their political and business tactics suggest two less flattering animal analogies.

One is the fox guarding the henhouse, as when the industry falsely claims its self-regulation guidelines are protecting young people from exposure to their sophisticated advertising. The other is the cash cow, ready to contribute to civil society organizations and health scientists to show they are good corporate citizens, even as they use their financial influence to undermine advocacy for effective policy and unbiased research.

"The need to maintain an independent scientific community capable of contributing to the policy process has been threatened by increasing involvement of commercial interests in scientific research on alcohol."

The amount of national and international attention that i-Mark has attracted is testimony to the growing threat of industry influence perceived by the public health community, civil society groups, government officials and others, who have experienced the bad behaviour of the industry first hand. To address this threat, there is now a need to expand the i-Mark concept far beyond Ireland and its civil society organizations. Here are a few suggestions.

i-Mark for academics

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As noted in the most recent edition of the book, Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity, "The need to maintain an independent scientific community capable of contributing to the policy process has been threatened by increasing involvement of commercial interests in scientific research on alcohol. The industry's involvement in scientific activities can confuse public discussion of health issues and policy options, and provides the industry with a convenient way to demonstrate 'corporate social responsibility' in its attempts to avoid taxation and regulation."

For these reasons, alcohol scientists have become increasingly skeptical about accepting industry funding for their research, despite efforts to co-opt the scientific community the same way that the tobacco industry paid sympathetic scientists to argue that tobacco products were not a cause of cancer, nicotine addiction and harm to others.

The alcohol producers involvement in an ill-fated \$100 million global study of the presumed health benefits of moderate drinking is just the latest example of how money can corrupt scientists and science. Not only should there be a public register of individual scientists who have pledged not to take money from the industry, there should also be a way for research centers and academic institutions to publically demonstrate their independence.

i-Mark for Government Officials and Other Users of the Revolving Door

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There have been numerous instances of prominent government officials and academics who have left their posts or retired with the golden handshake to take positions as board members, consultants or program directors with the alcohol industry. Marcus Grant, an alcohol policy expert, left his post at the World Health Organization to set up a front organization for a group of global alcohol producers that worked for several decades to undermine effective alcohol policies. Organizations that operate in the public interest need stronger policies to prevent their employees from selling their prestige and expertise to an industry that opposes the values and policies that serve the public good.

i-Mark for Graduate Students in marketing, psychology and business

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Marketing research firms hire trained professionals with advanced degrees in marketing to design better ways to sell products. When products are addictive like alcohol and tobacco, and when the consumers targeted by alcohol ads are below the legal purchase age, the use of scientific methods to develop and evaluate the industry's massive ad campaigns is unethical.

So is research on the taste of alcohol products to find flavors that appeal to young consumers, internal studies of how the liking and sharing of alcohol ads through the social media can contribute to sales, and research on how sales are affected by paid celebrity "influencers" who recommend alcohol products to young people. This kind of research would be considered unethical if it were conducted at a university to help companies sell alcohol, yet it is considered the norm in the business world. I-Mark initiatives should be targeted at schools of business and marketing in order to educate young professionals about the moral hazards of working with the alcohol industry.

i-Mark as a Pre-requisite for a successful Global Alcohol Policy Network

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Recently one of the i-Mark developers received a request to participate in an interview conducted by a public relations company working for an American NGO funded by a coalition of spirits producers. The NGO has a history of promoting ineffective alcohol policies and opposing effective measures to mitigate harm. They apparently wanted to learn how the NGO and its corporate sponsors would be perceived in Ireland, where they apparently are intending to expand their operations. Strategic initiatives like this are not uncommon in a multibillion dollar industry intent on preventing the erosion of its profits, especially when its market share is being threatened by effective alcohol policies.

"i-Mark could become an international symbol of freedom from the corrupting influence of the alcohol industry, and a clear signal that the industry should no longer be considered a legitimate participant in the policymaking process when public health is being threatened"

It is a sign that Big Alcohol is worried that the power of civil society organizations might be harnessed to build the kind of global network of policy advocates, academics, public health professionals and government officials that has been so successful in reversing the global tobacco epidemic. The French novelist Victor Hugo once said: "Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come." Like the hallmarks stamped on articles of gold and silver to certify their purity, i-Mark could become an international symbol of freedom from the corrupting influence of the alcohol industry, and a clear signal that the industry should no longer be considered a legitimate participant in the policymaking process when public health is being threatened.

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"The alcohol industry has no role in the formulation of alcohol policies, which must be protected from distortion by commercial or vested interests" -Dr Margaret Chan, Former Director General, WHO

Over the past 30 years, an accumulation of research and evidence has been generated to expose, highlight and document the multiple, complex and negative ways in which the corporate activities of the alcohol industry have impacted the health and well-being of individuals and communities across the globe.

Much of the valuable work of resisting the corporate agenda of the alcohol industry has focused on the changes required by government, political and legal institutions and regulatory authorities.

In the years since it was established in 2017, the Irish Community Action on Alcohol Network had observed the increasing impact that alcohol-industry was having on communities across Ireland. They felt their efforts to build safer communities, with reduced levels of consumption and harm, were being hampered by interference from the alcohol industry in communities, schools and national policy debates.

In response, they explored the potential and possibilities that communities themselves could have to become important sites of resistance to industry interference.

“ **The act of developing the i-Mark, its symbol, its slogan and its tools was an empowering process of resistance** ”

Driven by a strong belief that overcoming corporate influence was both possible and achievable, they harnessed their existing ways of working - knowledge and skills exchange, creative spaces for peer to peer and group learning and consultation with communities and member organisations.

The knowledge generated through these community conversations began to build a collective consciousness that the agenda of the industry needed to be exposed, made visible and resisted.

The i-Mark movement was launched on March 10th, 2022 by Professor Tom Babor. It provides a framework for:

- 1 Supporting and educating charity, community, voluntary and statutory organisations about the inherent conflict of interest for organisations in collaborating with the alcohol industry
- 2 Clarity about straightforward action steps organisations can take to reduce the influence of the alcohol industry on our children and communities
- 3 Alliance building; enabling organisations to connect with others and work together to reduce alcohol harm and the corrosive impact of alcohol industry practices

The i-Mark toolkit includes a summary of evidence and a check list of conflict-of-interest questions to guide decision making and membership forms

To hear more or request a presentation on i-Mark to your network / organisation, contact paula@alcoholforum.org

LEARN MORE

Click Play Button or Scan QR Code with your Phone to Watch



Hear from i-Mark supporters around the globe about the 6 industry tactics i-Mark can challenge



Paula Leonard, National Lead for Community Action on Alcohol interviews with Alcohol Review.



Above
 Paula Leonard, National Lead for Community
 Action on Alcohol; Mary Maguire
 Donegal Womens Centre.

EARLY ADOPTERS

Since its launch the i-Mark has generated significant local, national and international interest. Twenty six organisations, including a number of national organisations and networks, have formally signed up and others are in the process of doing so. There is growing interest in Ireland and globally.

Here, some of our early adopters explain why the i-Mark represented an important organisational initiative for them.

"A greater focus on transparency and accountability of sources. Pro-industry framings are often spread through corporate social responsibility initiatives and through sponsored third-party organisations. Exposing the links of such messages to their corporate architects could diminish their impact and give a voice to more independent alternatives"

Maani N, van Schalkwyk M C, Petticrew M, Buse K. The pollution of health discourse and the need for effective counter-framing
 BMJ 2022; 377

North Dublin Regional Drug & Alcohol Task Force

"We were proud to be an early adopter of the i-Mark. Ethically this was an easy decision to make. As one of the founder members of ICAAN, our Task force takes the position that the ideologies of big alcohol, and that of our own are simply not compatible.

A key focus of our work is to collaborate with partners to raise awareness of; and reduce alcohol related harm in communities. Reducing overall consumption is a key aspect of that strategy. Quite simply, the alcohol industry's raison d'être is to increase sales of alcohol. That is its job and it is very good at it.

We know that alcohol is bad for our health so on that basis there cannot be a role for the alcohol industry in health policy or alcohol education. These important public health priorities must be independent from the industry influences.

Our challenge is to create communities where we think critically about alcohol, including harms, drivers of consumption, and effective interventions and make our decisions based on independent accurate information provided by health experts not big PR machines with hidden messages"

BALLYMUN LOCAL DRUGS AND ALCOHOL TASK FORCE

Our task force members adopted the i-Mark, signalling a local commitment to minimise alcohol industry influence on our community's health and well-being in Ballymun. Fitting like a glove, strengthening and complementing our work since 2010 to reduce overall alcohol related harms.

Providing a toolkit to guide us in our continued work, a space to discuss and name the corporate agenda of the alcohol industry, a community of supporters and a vision of collective responsibility. Its authenticity as a homemade response to a global issue. Allowing flexibility for us to guide our own path, while reconciling the legitimacy of local action with local alcohol retailers as part of multi component area response.



ALCOHOL FORUM IRELAND

Proud supporters of the i-Mark, pictured from left to right: Kieran Doherty, CEO; Megan O'Donnell, Donegal Reach; Dr Anne Burke, Board Member; Dr Billy Bennett, Chairman; Paula Leonard, Community Action on Alcohol.

LETTERKENNY YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICE

In November 2021 we at LYFS were approached by Steven Garrusc who was on placement with Alcohol Forum Ireland as part of Health & Social Care course at LYIT. Steeven presented to us a new initiative by The Irish Community Action on Alcohol Network to address the use of branding and marketing used by the alcohol industry, and how we as a community based organisation respond to this. The question for us was, would we accept funding, promote the messages of or support from the alcohol industry or it's partners? The answer was easy, No! As a community based organisation who work with children, young people, individuals and families that suffer from alcohol misuse how could we !

It was similar to issue we had previously while delivering our childhood obesity project, MEET, when a fund available from Coca Cola looked to support the project, how could we? The answer will always be no! As a small organisation in society we will do everything we can to ensure we reduce the harm alcohol has on our community, particularly on those disadvantaged communities who suffer disproportionately from alcohol misuse and abuse.

We feel the i-Mark matches with our core values, to build safer communities, reducing the levels of alcohol consumption and harm. It is a challenge, Corporate V Community, while corporate has the finance, we have the connection with the people. The community organisations can have an impact, with ICAAN's bottom up approach, engaging communities on the ground can and I'm sure will have a huge impact on the burden alcohol has on our society.

ENDPAE

ÉNDpae is an all-island parents' and carers' support group dedicated to supporting people affected by FASD: Pictured: David Gerry, Paula Leonard, Guy Stephenson, Kieran Doherty, Annie Nugent



WHAT DO i-MARK ADOPTERS COMMIT TO?

1. Review any partnership or funding proposals against the questions outlined in the i-Mark toolkit.
2. Never accept funding from, or enter into partnerships with, the alcohol industry, its subsidiary companies, trade organisations, its funded charities or social aspect public relations organisations
3. Never use or promote alcohol industry funded materials or programmes in either educational or out of school settings with young people in Ireland and commit to investigating how any materials and / or programmes are funded
4. Scrutinise, challenge and raise awareness of the tactics of the alcohol industry in undermining public health in Ireland and beyond



NORTHWEST REGIONAL DRUG AND ALCOHOL TASK FORCE

Staff from North West Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force - Tracey Mitchell, Lorna Curry, Maeve Gallagher, Donna McGee (HSE addiction lead), CHO 1), chair Rosaleen O'Grady & Philip Maree

M-PACT - AN INITIATIVE OF ALCOHOL FORUM IRELAND

Philip Maree, Lead for M-PACT Sligo/Leitrim and West Cavan - M-PACT supports families to work together to understand how parental substance misuse has affected their lives. Proud supporter of i-Mark



CURRENT LIST OF ADOPTERS

The list below reflects all those organisations in Ireland who have gone through the formal process of adopting the i-Mark at Board level at the time of printing. The list is growing all the time and several organisations are in the process of adopting.

Alcohol Action Ireland
Alcohol Forum Ireland
Ballymun Local Drug and Alcohol Task Force
Blanchardstown Local Drug & Alcohol Taskforce
Clondalkin Local Drug and Alcohol Task Force
Cork Local Drug and Alcohol Task Force
Donegal Women's Centre
Donegal Youth Service
Dublin 15 Family Support Service
Dublin 12 Local Drug and Alcohol Task Force
Dublin City Public Participation Network
Dublin North East local Drug and Alcohol Task Force
ENDpae
Irish Community Action on Alcohol Network
Letterkenny Youth & Family Service
Meath Drug & Alcohol Forum
National Strengthening Families Council
National Youth Council of Ireland
North Dublin Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force
North East Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force
North West Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force
Rise Foundation
South West Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force
Southern Regional Drug & Alcohol Task Force
Tallaght Local Drug and Alcohol Task Force
The Star Project Ballymun
Western Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force

BECOME AN i-MARK CHAMPION



On Friday, May 13th, Paula Leonard delivered the first session of i-Mark champions training to a group of 19 people, comprising representatives of organisations who have adopted the i-Mark.

The training was designed to be participatory and support participants to identify and explore possible conflict of interest issues that they themselves are concerned about within their own sector or community.

This first session outlined the 'six key causes of concern' that are the focus of the i-Mark initiative, and explored two of these in further detail, presenting information from peer reviewed articles relating to these topics before participants had an opportunity to reflect in smaller breakout groups.

The participatory philosophy underpinning the i-Mark movement is supported by the development of the champions training, which has been designed to make the i-Mark easier to understand, easier to talk about and easier to promote.

It is envisaged that the training will be delivered three to four times per year as more organisations sign up and join the movement. If you would like to sign up for the next session, or you would be interested in organising champions training in your area, get in touch with paula@alcoholforum.org

'i-Mark champions training helped me see the importance of taking time to reflect and think about how my work might be compromised through funding from the alcohol industry, it gave me the tools to take forward deeper conversations with my colleagues and collaborators, bringing important questions to the fore about what checks and due diligence we need to be doing on a regular basis, to make sure the alcohol industry's fingers are nowhere near our efforts to make our communities healthier' – participant

'Participating in the i-Mark training has given me a clear understanding of the strategies used by the alcohol industry to deny/obscure the dangers of alcohol. It has also given me the tools and resources to take action and support independence from alcohol industry influence. Highly recommend the i-Mark Champions training.' - participant

IN OTHER NEWS

GRANT TO SUPPORT INTERGATED CARE RESEARCH

In February MaCYSS applied for a funding opportunity via the 'Mental Health Ireland Grant Scheme for Community and Voluntary Groups'. We submitted a research proposal to scope the essential components of integrated care for young people with mental health and AOD, with protocols for review. Our hope is that these protocols would guide the joint working of agencies working with young people for better outcomes. We were successful in our application for funding and the project will be complete by year end 2022.

NATIONAL AWARD FOR M-PACT

Moving Parents and Children Together (M-PACT , Sligo Leitrim) has received a National Award for ensuring the participation of children and young people in service development. The service was assessed by Tusla and then independently evaluated by the Investing in Children Team in the UK.

2ND WORLD ASSEMBLY ON COMMUNITY ACTION ON ALCOHOL

From around the globe over 100 community activists gathered to discuss the WHO Global Alcohol plan. The World Assembly for Community Action on Alcohol is a joint initiative with Movendi International.



2nd WACAA MEETING
The Community Perspective on the WHO Global Alcohol Action Plan: Challenges, Needs, Opportunities

Save the date

Date	May 11, 2022
Time	9.00am-12.00pm CEST
Place	Zoom
Register	movendi.ngo

MOVENDI INTERNATIONAL | [icaan](https://www.icaan.org)

NEW RESOURCES

SUPPORTING PARENTS AND FAMILIES IMPACTED BY ALCOHOL OR OTHER DRUGS

In March 2022, the Irish Community Action on Alcohol Network launched a new national resource promoting the different family support programmes for families impacted by alcohol and other drug use.

The resource launched in March is available here: [ICAAN-SupportingFamiliesChildren.pdf](https://alcoholforum.org/ICAAN-SupportingFamiliesChildren.pdf) (alcoholforum.org)

Five new animations 'Five Stories of Hope and Recovery' were also developed as short, positive stories designed to reduce stigma, promote help seeking and encourage people to seek help and support. They can be viewed on Alcohol Forum Irelands YouTube channel.



Thiamine, Healthy Eating & You

You can help prevent alcohol-related brain injury



www.alcoholforum.org

THIAMINE, HEALTHY EATING AND YOU

Up to 80% of people with Alcohol Use Disorder are deficient in Thiamine, an important causative factor of Alcohol Related Brain Injury.

This self and practitioner directed resource provides service users with all information they need to know about Thiamine deficiency and what they can do to reduce their risk of developing Alcohol-Related Brain Injury.

Available to download from alcoholforum.org/thiamine.

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