

Energy labelling for alcoholic beverages in New Zealand: Consumer perceptions

Phase 1 report: Focus groups

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NIHI
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agency
TE HIRINGA HAUORA

Prepared for the Health Promotion Agency (HPA) by:
The National Institute for Health Innovation, University of Auckland.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest. The group facilitators (Lee Ryan, Shaun Akroyd) declare they have had not undertaken any work around alcohol for commercial entities in the last five years. Shaun Akroyd has previously undertaken alcohol-related research for HPA.

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Any queries regarding this report should be directed to HPA at the following address:

Health Promotion Agency
PO Box 2142
Wellington 6140
New Zealand
www.hpa.org.nz
enquiries@hpa.org.nz

NZBN 9429041905333

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CONTENTS

- EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 3
- BACKGROUND 6
 - Introduction..... 6
 - Prevalence of alcohol consumption in New Zealand 6
 - Health and nutritional labelling 7
 - Consumer attitudes to alcohol labelling 8
 - Study rationale..... 9
- METHOD 10
 - Study design..... 10
 - Participants..... 10
 - Baseline data..... 10
 - Focus group design 11
 - Label designs 11
 - Themes discussed..... 12
 - Analysis 13
- RESULTS 14
 - Awareness of the energy density of alcoholic beverages 14
 - Influence of energy labelling on likely purchase and consumption of alcoholic beverages..... 17
 - Views on different types of energy labelling for alcoholic beverages..... 19
 - Information to include on energy labels for alcoholic beverages 28
- DISCUSSION..... 33
 - Study limitations 34
 - Conclusion..... 34
- REFERENCES 36
- APPENDIX 1: LABELLING OPTIONS..... 39
- APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE 43

APPENDIX 3: ENERGY CONTENT WORKSHEET48
APPENDIX 4: SUGAR INFOGRAPHIC.....49
APPENDIX 5: PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS50

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research was undertaken by the National Institute of Health Innovation (NIHI), University of Auckland, to provide insight into consumers' awareness of, and views around, energy labelling of alcoholic beverages. This report summarises the first phase of the two-part research project, namely the qualitative research to determine the influence of energy labelling on the likely purchase and consumption of alcoholic beverages. The second phase relates to the conduct of a four-arm parallel group clinical trial testing the effects of different types of energy labels placed on alcoholic beverages on purchase behaviour. The results of the trial are reported in a separate document.

Limited research exists on the impact of energy labelling on alcohol purchase and consumption. What research has been undertaken is from Europe and the USA, and so not directly relevant to the Australasian alcohol policy and regulatory environment. We conducted an exploratory qualitative study to fill this gap. This report summarises findings from seven focus groups undertaken in Auckland, New Zealand, where consumers' awareness of energy in alcoholic beverages, the effects of different types of energy labelling on likely purchase and consumption of alcohol, and consumers' views on energy labelling of alcoholic beverages were explored.

Focus group participants were asked for their views on different types of energy labelling. The labels included:

- a Nutrition Information Panel (NIP)
- a stand-alone energy label/icon (in kilojoules and calories) shown with and without % daily intake (DI)
- a combination label with energy, standard drinks, and % alcohol content presented together in one panel.

Participants were also asked about what information they would want to include on their 'ideal label' and to design a label for alcoholic beverages with this information.

Key Findings

Awareness of the energy in alcohol

- Participants were generally unaware that alcohol is the main source of energy in alcoholic beverages and instead focused on sugar.

Influence of energy labelling on likely purchase and consumption of alcohol

- Participants varied with respect to the information they would like to see, and would find useful, when purchasing alcoholic beverages.
- When participants were asked what information would most likely influence their decision to buy or consume alcoholic beverages, energy content information was ranked first (of the options presented to them, i.e. energy content, health warnings, low risk drinking advice, and other).
- Some participants mentioned that energy labels might influence their decision to buy or consume alcoholic beverages, if they were specifically motivated to restrict their energy consumption, or were trying to choose between different products.
- However, most participants reported that the presented labels would have little to no impact on their likely purchase or consumption of alcoholic beverages.

Views on different types of energy labelling for alcoholic beverages

- Participants found that none of the presented labels were ideal.
- The most favoured label included three components within one label, namely energy (kilojoules, calories, and % daily intake), % alcohol content, and standard drinks.
- Most participants did not perceive the NIP label as useful and some participants found the information in the NIP overwhelming.
- Terms such as kilojoules, calories, % daily intake and standard drinks were confusing and not well understood (except by those who were health conscious).

Information to include on energy labels for alcoholic beverages

- While few participants liked the NIP (in relation to the other presented labels), almost all retained the NIP when designing their ideal label.
- Participants expressed a clear desire for more information on alcoholic beverage labels, compared to the status quo.
- Participants felt alcohol energy labels should be placed primarily on the front of bottles, be visually engaging, simple, concrete, require no calculation, should not look like a 'wine award' label, and should enable easy comparison between different types of alcoholic beverages.

Implications

For energy labelling on alcoholic beverages to be effective, it needs to be presented in a concrete or tangible way, using a format that allows easy comparison between different alcoholic beverages. If energy labelling was to become a requirement on alcoholic beverages, further research would be needed to identify a label that the majority of alcohol consumers resonate with and understand.

BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

This research was undertaken by the National Institute of Health Innovation (NIHI), University of Auckland, to provide insight into consumers' awareness of, and views around, energy labelling of alcoholic beverages. This report summarises the first phase of the two-part research project, namely the qualitative research to determine the influence of energy labelling on the likely purchase and consumption of alcoholic beverages. The second phase relates to the conduct of a four-arm parallel group clinical trial testing the effects of different types of energy labels placed on alcoholic beverages on purchase behaviour. The results of the trial are reported in a separate document.

The Health Promotion Agency (HPA) commissioned this research to help fill a gap in consumer research on awareness of the energy content of alcoholic beverages and consumer understanding of energy labelling for alcohol beverages. The research has also been commissioned to inform trans-Tasman policy work on the energy labelling of alcohol beverages.

PREVALENCE OF ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IN NEW ZEALAND

In 2016/17, approximately four in every five New Zealand adults (15 years and older) (79%) consumed alcohol in the past year. One in five (19.5%) adults had an alcohol drinking pattern that carried a risk of harming the drinker or another individual, and one in three (32.9%) young adults aged 18 to 24 years were drinking at hazardous levels (Ministry of Health, 2017).

Hazardous drinking is defined as an Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) score of 8 or more (Babor, Higgins-Biddle, Saunderson, & Monteiro, 2001). Men, young adults (aged 18 to 24 years), Māori adults, and adults living in the most deprived areas of New Zealand have the highest prevalence of hazardous drinking (Ministry of Health, 2016a), and thus greater potential for alcohol-related harm. In 2013, alcohol use accounted for just under 4% of the total health loss in New Zealand, with half of this health loss due to chronic disease (including mental illnesses such as alcohol use disorder), and the remainder due to injury (Ministry of Health, 2016b).

The high, and in some cases, increasing prevalence of hazardous drinking in New Zealand indicates that new strategies are needed to reduce alcohol-related harm and help New Zealanders make positive decisions about their alcohol use. These strategies should not only inform individuals about health risks, but also alter the environment where they find themselves on a daily basis. Environmental factors (such as marketing, supply, labelling, and pricing) are known to be strongly correlated with the uptake of 'dangerous consumptions' such as unhealthy eating (Swinburn, et al., 2011) and tobacco use (Calo & Krasny, 2013). Environmental factors have also been acknowledged as playing a crucial role regarding alcohol use and related harm (New Zealand Law Commission, 2010). For example, standard serving size (Kersbergen, Jones, Field, Angus, & Robinson, 2018), the type of glassware used (Stead, Angus, MacDonald, & Bauld, 2014), and outlet density (Connor, Kypri, & Bell, 2010) are all factors shown to influence consumers and increase alcohol consumption. Although consumer education, including alcohol labelling, is important in raising awareness of the potential harms of alcohol consumption, it needs to be part of a package of evidence-based policies and interventions including those that address alcohol availability, price, and marketing (Babor, et al., 2010).

HEALTH AND NUTRITIONAL LABELLING

Unlike most packaged food products, alcoholic beverages are not generally required to display ingredient lists or nutrition information on the package. Under the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code (Australian Government, 2018), alcoholic beverages sold in New Zealand are not currently required to carry a nutrition information panel (NIP), nor energy information, unless they are making a claim about energy, carbohydrates, or gluten (such as 'low carb' or '99% sugar free'). Some New Zealand alcohol producers, particularly in the beer industry, provide nutrition information and energy content (directly on the labels or on their websites) on a voluntary basis or because a claim has been made (Health Promotion Agency, 2017). The Code also requires that beverages that contain more than 0.5% alcohol by volume display the alcohol content on the product (in mL per 100 mL or as % of alcohol by volume) and the number of standard drinks. A 'standard drink' is defined as 10 grams of ethanol at 20°C (Australian Government, 2018).

In the absence of nutrition/energy information, consumers of alcohol are likely to have little knowledge of how much energy (in calories or kilojoules) is in the alcoholic beverages they are consuming (Clemens, 2017). A survey among 550 American adults showed that only 10% of

respondents correctly identified the number of kilojoules in a regular beer (Center for Science in the Public Interest, 2003). Placing energy content information on alcoholic products may help consumers make more informed and responsible decisions regarding the amount of alcohol they consume, which could potentially reduce the adverse health-related consequences associated with excessive alcohol consumption.

The high prevalence of obesity among New Zealand adults is a major impetus for the provision of energy information on alcoholic beverages. Alcohol is an energy-dense beverage and alcohol consumption has been shown to be significantly associated with weight gain (French, Norton, Fang, & MacLean, 2011). Estimates suggest that approximately 4.9% (range: 4.5%-5.4%) of the New Zealand adults' daily energy intake is provided by alcoholic beverages (University of Otago and Ministry of Health, 2011).

Research indicates that nutrition labelling of food and non-alcoholic beverage products does impact consumer perceptions and product evaluations (Ni Mhurchu et al., 2017). However, there are few studies that have examined consumer awareness of the energy content of alcohol and the impact of energy labelling. A pilot study conducted in the USA among 58 undergraduate university students (aged 20 to 32 years) examined knowledge of energy content and alcohol levels in alcoholic beverages (Bui, Burton, Howlett, & Kozup, 2008). This study showed that, overall, consumers lacked confidence in their ability to accurately estimate the kilojoules and nutrient levels of alcoholic beverages, and that the accuracy of their estimates varied across beverage types.

CONSUMER ATTITUDES TO ALCOHOL LABELLING

Consumers in various countries have expressed interest in the inclusion of health information on alcohol products. For example, a survey conducted with 1,016 adults across three European countries and the USA found that wine consumers were interested in receiving additional nutritional and health information on wine (Annunziata, Pomaric, Vecchio, & Mariani, 2016). In a recent poll of 3,300 New Zealanders by Stuff.co.nz, 83% of respondents indicated that they want to know what they are consuming and supported placement of ingredients and nutritional information on alcohol products (Suckling, 2017). This finding is consistent with results from the 2016 Health and Lifestyles Survey, which surveyed New Zealand adults aged ≥ 15 years who reported drinking alcohol in the past year ($n=2,666$) (Health Promotion Agency, 2017). One-third (34%) of respondents agreed that energy content information on alcohol beverages would influence how much they drink, or what they choose to drink, while 13% of respondents were

neutral and 51% disagreed. Women (39%) and those aged 15 to 54 years (36%) were significantly more likely than men (28%) and those aged ≥ 55 years (28%) to report that energy content information on alcoholic beverages would influence how much they drink, or what they choose to drink. Furthermore, those who reported using mandatory NIPs on food and non-alcoholic beverages to inform their purchasing choices, were significantly more likely to agree that having energy content information on alcoholic beverages would influence how much they drink, or what they choose to drink, than those who did not report using nutrition labels on food (47% vs 32% respectively, $p < 0.05$) (Health Promotion Agency, 2017).

STUDY RATIONALE

Despite consumer interest in nutrition/energy labelling for alcoholic beverages, there remains very little research on the topic, and what does exist has a number of limitations. First, there is limited New Zealand research on alcohol labelling, and international research (other than Australian research (Victoria Health Promotion Foundation, 2009)) may not be directly relevant to the New Zealand environment given differences in labelling requirements and the ethnic and cultural diversity of New Zealand's population. Collectivist cultures, such as Māori and Pacific cultures, may have different experiences around alcohol that should inform policy. Second, the studies that have been conducted involved highly selected populations (e.g. students 20 to 36 years), and so findings are not broadly generalisable. Third, no qualitative research has been published on nutrition and energy labelling of alcoholic beverages, thus limiting our understanding of this important topic. A qualitative study was, therefore, designed to provide insight into consumers' perspectives on different energy and nutrition labelling options for alcohol, and how they may influence purchase behaviour and alcohol consumption.

METHOD

STUDY DESIGN

The study aimed to explore consumer awareness of the energy content of alcohol, the effects of different types of energy labelling on the likely purchase and consumption of alcohol, and views on different types of energy labelling for alcoholic beverages. We used a qualitative study design, using focus group methodology. Ethics approval for the study was obtained from the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (Ref # 021085).

PARTICIPANTS

Recruitment

Participants were recruited from the Auckland region via a third party (Prime Research) using a nationwide panel. Members of the panel were emailed the study information and were invited to complete an on-line questionnaire to determine eligibility and to collect baseline data. Eligible individuals were contacted by phone to explain the study in detail and allocate participants into the required focus groups. Prime Research aimed to recruit a sample that was broadly representative of the New Zealand population according to age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and alcohol consumption.

Eligibility criteria

Participants were eligible to take part in a focus group if they met the following criteria: (1) aged ≥ 18 years; (2) reported purchasing and consuming at least one alcoholic beverage in the past month; (3) able to read and speak English; and (4) resided in New Zealand. Individuals that did not meet these criteria were excluded.

BASELINE DATA

Baseline demographic information included age, gender, ethnicity, education, income level, and household size. Alcohol use was assessed using the AUDIT-C (a short form of the AUDIT), which is shown to have good reliability and validity across different age groups, gender and ethnicities (Dawson, Grant & Stinson, 2005). Mild to moderate alcohol use was indicated by an AUDIT-C score of < 3 for women and < 4 for men, while heavy alcohol use was indicated by an AUDIT-C score of ≥ 3 for women and ≥ 4 for men (Towers et al., 2011).

FOCUS GROUP DESIGN

A specialist qualitative research agency (Springboard Ideas Ltd) was contracted to moderate the focus groups. Eligible participants were assigned to one of six focus groups based on their age and alcohol use. A seventh focus group was also run by a Māori facilitator, with Māori participants of mixed age and alcohol use. All participants in the Māori-only focus group met the AUDIT-C criteria for heavy alcohol use.

- Group 1: 18 to 25 years of age, mild/moderate drinkers
- Group 2: 18 to 25 years of age, heavy drinkers
- Group 3: 26 to 50 years of age, mild/moderate drinkers
- Group 4: 26 to 50 years of age, heavy drinkers
- Group 5: ≥51 years of age, mild/moderate drinkers
- Group 6: ≥51 years of age, heavy drinkers
- Group 7: Māori-only, mixed age, heavy drinkers

Each focus group was scheduled to run for 90 minutes. At the end of each focus group, participants were provided with HPA's pamphlet *DrinkCheck: Is your drinking OK?* that included advice about low-risk drinking and where to find help with problem drinking.

LABEL DESIGNS

In the focus group, participants were shown four different types of energy labelling and asked their views on how labels would affect their intention to purchase and consume these items (Appendix 1). Labels were presented on generic, non-branded bottles and included all mandatory labelling (i.e. the standard drinks icon and % alcohol content). Except for Label 1, the labels were presented on the type of alcoholic beverage that each participant indicated they were most likely to drink (i.e. beer, wine, or spirits).

- Label 1: Beer with a nutrition information panel (NIP). The NIP was placed on the back of the bottle along with the standard drinks icon and % alcohol content. The panel included all nutrient information required for alcoholic beverages making an energy claim

(i.e. energy, protein, fat, saturated fat, carbohydrates, sugar, dietary fibre, and sodium). Nutrition information and energy values were obtained from the New Zealand Food Composition Database (Sivakumaran, Huffman, & Sivakumaran, 2017). Energy values were presented in common serving sizes (330 ml bottle of beer, 125ml of wine and 30ml of spirits).

- Label 2: Round energy icon. All information was provided on the front-of-bottle with a stand-alone energy icon displaying energy in kilojoules (usually reported as 'kJ') and calories (usually reported as 'Cal').
- Label 3: Round energy icon with % daily intake (DI). This label was identical to Label 2, except for the addition of % DI per serve beneath the kilojoules and calories. The label also included the fine print "based on an average adult diet of 8700 kJ".
- Label 4: Alcoholic beverage with one combined label. The combined label included the standard drinks icon, % alcohol content, and the round energy icon (with kilojoules, calories, and % DI per serve) in a single location on the front of the bottle.

HPA and the Ministry for Primary Industries provided input into the labelling options to help ensure that the options being tested had the potential to be used on future alcoholic beverage labelling.

THEMES DISCUSSED

The focus group discussion was semi-structured and followed an interview guide administered by experienced qualitative researchers (Appendix 2). Participants were advised that the main purpose of the group discussion was to talk about the energy content of alcoholic beverages. At the start of the focus group participants filled in a worksheet depicting five different alcoholic beverages (beer, wine, ready-to-drink (RTD), spirits, and sparkling wine) and were asked to estimate the energy content of each beverage (Appendix 3).

The interview guide focused on the themes of:

- awareness of the energy density of alcoholic beverages
- impact of energy labelling on likely purchase and consumption of alcoholic beverages
- views on different types of energy labelling.

After viewing the alcohol labels participants were asked to create their own alcohol labels – labels they felt may be effective in changing attitudes and lowering purchase intention.

At the end of the discussion, participants were provided with an infographic representing the amount of energy in each alcoholic beverage by its equivalent in sugar cubes (Appendix 4). This graphic was used to communicate the relative energy content of different alcoholic beverages and how this related to the addition of mixers.

ANALYSIS

Focus group discussions were audio-taped, transcribed and analysed verbatim. Key themes emerging from the conversations were identified through manual observation and analysed using the general inductive approach, which allows research findings to merge from multiple readings of raw data. This method is a well-accepted way of analysing qualitative data and for letting ‘themes’ emerge from the data, rather than bringing pre-conceived ideas to the data.

RESULTS

The following results are presented in the order themes were discussed during the focus group discussion. Thirty-five people participated across seven focus groups. Participant demographics are described in Appendix 5. The main themes identified were around awareness of the energy density of alcoholic beverages, influence of labelling on purchase and consumption behaviour, views on the labelling options presented, and what information to include on labels.

AWARENESS OF THE ENERGY DENSITY OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

Four key themes were identified from the focus groups in relation to awareness of the energy density of alcoholic beverages. These themes were: awareness and understanding of the energy density of alcoholic beverages was low; personal experience and practical comparisons shape thinking about energy content; and positive and negative behaviours associated with drinking.

Awareness and understanding of the energy density of alcoholic beverages was low

Most participants were not calorie or kilojoule literate, and typically did not actively consider 'energy' when purchasing or consuming alcoholic beverages (unless they are specifically motivated to do so, for example, if participants were weight-conscious).

*"I don't even know what a calorie is."
"I think a lot of people wouldn't understand like the kilojoules and things like that."
"A lot of people just don't care."
"And you say calories, or like kilojoules, people are like 'what is that?'"*
Group 2: 18 to 25 years of age, heavy drinkers

Participants varied in their knowledge of the energy content contained in alcoholic beverages. While some participants had no knowledge of calories/kilojoules, others were aware but were unable to say how many calories they should be aiming for in a day, or estimate how many might be in a drink. Some participants had some idea of the comparative calories in different alcoholic beverages, while others could make good estimates of how many calories might be in a glass of wine or bottle of beer. Participants in this last category typically had been educated through experiences of dieting or sports training.

In every age group, and across both drinking categories (mild/moderate and heavy drinkers), participants varied in their ability to estimate the energy content of specific alcoholic beverages. When participants were given a worksheet with five alcoholic beverages (Appendix 3) and asked to estimate how many kilojoules or calories were in each, some groups elected to rank the energy content of the different alcoholic beverages by writing 'less' or 'more' or 'much more'. While participants were somewhat accurate in the comparative rank, specific estimates of the energy content varied considerably. For example, in Group 4 (26 to 50 years, heavy drinkers) estimates for a 330mL bottle of beer ranged from 15kJ to 1670kJ. Similarly, estimates for a 375mL RTD alcoholic beverage ranged from 300kJ to 2090kJ. Many participants expected that beer would have a much higher energy content than wine. For example, participants in the Māori-only focus group ranked beer as being the second highest in energy, with the RTD ranked first. Participants consistently underestimated the relative energy content of a serving of red wine, and overestimated the relative energy content of a bottle of beer. These findings may be because participants tended to associate red wine with health benefits, whereas beer was associated with a "beer belly".

"If I use my family as an example, my Mum drinks a lot of red wine and that gives her a good tummy. My brother drinks beer all the time, he's naturally skinny and he's got a big tummy."

Group 7: Māori, mixed age and heavy drinkers

Personal experience and practical comparisons shape thinking about energy content

Participants generally understood that there is a link between alcohol consumption and weight gain. This was evident in discussions around their own experiences of weight gain or loss and references made to "beer bellies". For those participants who were not 'calorie literate', some had remembered specific comparisons of a beer to either food items (e.g. pizza or donuts), or a period of exercise. This type of comparison to a material/concrete example appeared to be more salient to participants than energy content alone.

"There's that old saying that a beer is roughly like eating a donut so in terms of what you're putting in your body nutrition-wise so 90 calories doesn't seem like a lot."

Group 1: 18 to 25 years of age, mild/moderate drinkers

Positive and negative behaviours associated with drinking

Many participants noted that drinking was often paired with unhealthy food choices. When participants considered their energy intake from drinking, they took into account the energy from foods that accompanied drinking, such as fatty or high carbohydrate foods, rather than the energy from alcohol alone. Some discussed eating as a tactic to absorb the alcohol, while others admitted to a lessening of willpower around food consumption.

“People say like if you have carbs beforehand...you know you won't get as drunk as quickly and then when you're drunk you want carbs so you go and have a BK or whatever.”

“They tend to say the fattier foods tend to absorb the alcohol but I'm not sure about that theory.”

“Yeah I think bread's help more.”

“They will definitely taste better when you're drinking.”

Group 2: 18 to 25 years of age, heavy drinkers

“Until usually the end of the night, which would be part of why people would put on a bit more weight from drinking because McDonalds will make you feel better after you drink because you want some greasy food – you wake up the next day hungover, what do you do? You go down and get a kai.”

Group 7: Māori, mixed age and heavy drinkers

While most participants stated that they did not adjust their food intake for what they drank, some participants indicated that a 'big Saturday night drinking' might be followed by exercise the following day (e.g. a run or a visit to the gym) to help their body readjust and to compensate for the added calories from the night before.

“Usually it would be Friday drinks, Saturday drinks, Sunday a lot of sports to kind of just normalise myself, sweat it all out and get ready for the next day.”

Group 2: 18 to 25 years of age, heavy drinkers

Some members of the Māori focus group indicated that they sometimes compensated for the calories drunk or consumed, either by engaging in physical activity after drinking or by eating

well during the day in order to 'earn' a night out. Some participants also talked about not eating while drinking, as it might reduce the effects of alcohol or detract from the drinking experience.

*"...sometimes my friends once they have had a drink they can't have anything to eat – they are like, I'm not eating for the rest of the night now!
...if I've eaten well during the day then at least I've earned drinks later on."*

Group 7: Māori, mixed age and heavy drinkers

INFLUENCE OF ENERGY LABELLING ON LIKELY PURCHASE AND CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

People varied in their answers about what consumer information they would like to see on all bottles of alcohol and what they would personally find most useful when buying. Alcohol content was most consistently selected as the first choice out of the five options of: alcohol content; energy (kilojoule/calorie) content; carbohydrate content; sugar content; and number of standard drinks per bottle. The importance of this information appeared to be linked to how participants used it. For example, using the alcohol content information to estimate how many drinks they can have and still drive, or to pace themselves so they can 'last the night', and knowing how much they are drinking so that they don't get too drunk (or drink too quickly).

"Honestly, if you're trying to...you know... if you're on a budget and trying to find the best bang for buck and trying to find drinks that are affordable, taste okay and have a higher alcohol content."

Group 2: 18 to 25 years of age, heavy drinkers

The younger group of heavy drinkers also discussed how family occasions are one scenario where they all did not want to get too drunk and embarrass themselves.

"For me it would be like the alcohol percentage, knowing I can make... myself...So I don't get too drunk, say if it's a family thing, if I have a 47% drink like I'm only going to have a couple otherwise I would get wasted and I don't really want to get wasted at a family thing...so yeah."

Group 2: 18 to 25 years of age, heavy drinkers

Nutrient or health-related labelling

When asked what labelling information would be most likely to influence their decision to buy or consume an alcoholic beverage, **energy was consistently ranked first** (out of: energy; health warnings; low risk drink advice; and other). When asked what information about the energy content of alcoholic beverages would be most likely to influence their decision to buy or consume a product (out of: calories; kilojoules; sugar content; carbohydrates; and other), **most participants prioritised kilojoules or calories**, followed closely by a group prioritising sugar content.

“I had the same first alcohol content and second standard drinks and third I was tossing between the energy content or the carbs from the sugar... because I suddenly realised that some of these drinks, not only alcohol ones, but fizzy drinks, they talk a lot about the sugar but carbs are also there, it’s something I’ve heard that carbs make you put on weight so if you’re drinking something with a high carb level and unknowingly why you are putting on the weight.”

Group 5: ≥ 51 years of age, mild/moderate drinkers

When asked where the energy content in alcoholic beverages comes from, knowledge varied, though most participants made an association with sugar. Some went on to discuss sugar coming from the fruit or ingredients, or somehow involved in the alcohol fermentation process.

“I reckon ... it’s not organic I don’t think, don’t they, I don’t know, I don’t bake but the way they manufacture sugar is how it is ... brown or coconut sugar and all of that.”

Group 3: 26 to 50 years of age, mild/moderate drinkers

Alcohol labelling in a Māori context

Participants in the Māori-only focus group generally had similar views on alcohol labelling to those in the other focus groups. Māori participants spoke about drinking occurring in a social environment, and how this might reduce the impact of energy labelling on behaviour. Māori participants were more likely to emphasise health-related information on labels, such as allergies and health warnings related to alcohol.

When participants in the Māori-only group were asked about what implications alcohol labelling might have on ‘Māori’ settings, most participants mentioned the importance of making sure that people were aware of the labels so that individuals and groups interested in promoting wellbeing for Māori could be supported to act in positive ways. In particular, participants noted the growing

number of marae that are smoke-free or 'healthy food' minded, and that alcohol labelling might align with those practices.

"This relates...only in the fact that a lot of marae now have moved to non-smoking and eating better foods, that comes close up with it."
Group 7: Māori, mixed age, heavy drinkers

VIEWS ON DIFFERENT TYPES OF ENERGY LABELLING FOR ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

Participants viewed four different labels which had been enhanced with energy content information. All four labels included the mandatory labelling for alcoholic beverages (standard drinks icon and % alcohol content), although this content was not intended as the focus of discussion. Overall, the focus group participants preferred Label 4 out of the four options presented. The least preferred label was Label 3, which included % DI and energy content. Participants' feelings were generally mixed with respect to Label 1.

Label 1: Nutrition information panel

Figure 1: Label 1 (Nutrition information panel, back-of-bottle)



The NIP on the back of a beer bottle appealed only to a limited number of people (Figure 1, Appendix 1). Participants who liked the NIP stated that they liked seeing the detail about different elements in the drink and that if they wanted to see the information, it was on the back of the bottle. They also liked the familiarity of the NIP and that it was packaged in a way that

they understood already from reading food labels. Older participants appeared to like the completeness of the information presented. Participants discussed that it would be useful if people wanted to compare specific items (e.g. sugar versus carbohydrates).

“I think it would be useful for comparative reasons, the fact, we do it with food now, and if I was looking at a bottle that has not got as much sugar in as that one or whatever, so it would give me a tool to compare things with.”

Group 6: ≥ 51 years of age, heavy drinkers

“...actually if you wanted to compare one drink to another of what you drink, then that’s kind of useful, it’s packaged up in a way which you understand from other food labels.”

Group 3: 26 to 50 years of age, mild/moderate drinkers

Most participants **did not perceive the NIP label as useful** and some participants found the information overwhelming. Even those that regularly used NIPs to compare food and non-alcoholic beverages indicated that the information was hard to understand without expert knowledge.

“I thought it was kind of useless because most of it is just saying there’s nothing of something in there really. They could have cut it down to two lines maybe and whatever is negligible you can just not mention, and whatever is important and people want to know they can have easily.”

“... the rest was just a jumble of numbers.”

Group 3: 26 to 50 years of age, mild/moderate drinkers

“It is great having all these statistics on the back of a bottle, but how do you put that into what is actually good for you from that bottle unless you are a nutritionist? That is the way I looked at it.”

Group 7: Māori, mixed age, heavy drinkers

“Yeah I just don’t understand some things like sodium, dietary fibre, like I don’t really care about that. The other thing – protein – I wouldn’t care about. Energy, fat and sugars I’d look at and be interested in.”

Group 1: 18 to 25 years of age, mild/moderate drinkers

Label 2: Round energy icon

Figure 2: Label 2 (Front-of-bottle separated label, energy icon without % DI)



Label 2 was an energy label on the front of the bottle that stated the energy content per serve in kilojoules and calories (Figure 2, Appendix 1). **Participants perceived this label as eye catching and simple.** This label tended to appeal to participants more than the NIP (Label 1). People found this label more convenient as it took less effort to process the information and was more noticeable.

The label provided the key information participants wanted, as opposed to the NIP, which provided information they were either uninterested in or did not understand (e.g. fibre).

“I like how the volume is right there on top of the percentage because that’s what I use definitely.”

“It gave everything I wanted, from standard drinks to alcohol percentage, and yeah, it was helpful.”

Group 1: 18 to 25 years of age, mild/moderate drinkers

Those that did not like this type of label either had a preference for more information (e.g. as in the NIP), were uninterested in energy content information, or found that the information about the energy and alcohol content was too fragmented. Some participants thought this label looked like an award sticker.

In general, participants preferred straightforward information where they could easily compare drinks, or understand the implications of drinking a glass. However, they found the distinction between 'per serve' (in the energy label) and 'standard drinks' more complicated and were unsure of how the two related.

"I thought it was a lot clearer and more useful than the other label, just its simplicity, I did write down that the 125ml serve, I was wondering whether or not that was a standard drink and how much that would be if it was, so you were saying you're getting this much energy for something but I couldn't use this to compare with the vodka now because it's two different amounts. But if it was a standard drink, maybe you could compare because you're getting this amount of alcohol... Because whenever you drink a bottle of wine, you never divide it up into 8.3 anyway so you'll never know how much it is unless."

Group 3: 26 to 50 years of age, mild/moderate drinkers

Some participants attempted to calculate the energy content for the container (e.g. the whole bottle of wine). Most appeared to use calories but, having introduced kilojoules into the focus group discussion, sometimes used these terms interchangeably (unless they were a dieter or into sports nutrition).

"Yeah, oh 400 calories per serving, and then there's roughly 750mls, so roughly 6 x 125 is probably 750 so it's about 2500 kilojoules in the bottle, I don't really know if that means much to me but it's like ok, it's nice, yeah, sweet. Feels like I know a little bit more about it."

Group 4: 26 to 50 years of age, heavy drinkers

Label 3: Round energy icon with % DI

Figure 3: Label 3 (Front-of-bottle separated label, energy icon with % DI)



This label was a variant of the second label, and included % DI underneath energy content - along with the words “based on an average adult diet of 8700 kJ” (Figure 3, Appendix 1).

The % DI calculates the percentage of daily energy intake (based on 8700 kJ) contained in one serving. **Label 3 was the least favoured label, partly because most participants did not perceive the additional information as making the label more useful.**

Participant responses to Label 3 could be grouped into four main categories:

- **Want it and value it:** Some participants mentioned ‘recommended daily intake’ or ‘daily intake’ as a key element in response to Label 2. These people liked seeing daily intake on the Label 3 variant.

“because DI is a good indicative comparison thing and, but 5% is .. so you have two glasses of wine, it’s still 10% on your daily intake, you’ll be fine right?”

Group 3: 26-50 years of age, mild/moderate drinkers

- **Uninterested:** These people did not care about energy content and were uninterested in either calories or daily intake information.
- **Confused:** A number of participants were unsure of the meaning of 'DI', without the fine print "based on the average adult diet of 8700 kJ", which they used as a reference.

"I don't know what they're basing it off, the average adult diet. Yeah I would question that too, what kind of adult as there are so many variables."

Group 4: 26 to 50 years of age, heavy drinkers

"I think it would make me less likely to buy it because I'd be confused. DI is totally confusing and I think if it would explain what DI stood for then that would be a lot more helpful"

Group 7: Māori, mixed age, heavy drinkers

- **Found the information misleading:** The more a participant knew about energy content, the more likely they were to find the daily intake information misleading, as daily intake varies according to gender, size, and how much exercise people do.

"May as well not be on there, just like a flat daily intake that's meant to be representative across a very diverse population, it means nothing. This is going to be 10% for one person, .2% for another person.....I find it pretty misleading as well...I'm not an expert, I just you know, why would you, you talk about false advertisement on healthy products, well this is another one."

Group 1: 18 to 25 years of age, mild/moderate drinkers

Label 4: Combined label

Figure 4: Label 4 (Front-of-bottle combined label)



Label 4 was a front-of-bottle label with all information (standard drinks, % alcohol content, and energy content with % DI) contained in a single label (Figure 4, Appendix 1). **This label was the preferred label (of the four labels presented to the seven focus groups).**

This label appealed to participants because the information was easy to see or find, the information was all in one place, and combined energy information with the standard drinks icon and % alcohol content. Participants felt that Label 4 was ‘easy to read’ or ‘fresh’ because there wasn’t too much information to read.

“...it’s got everything I need to know and stuff for the health freaks as well. The approximate drinks is probably more relevant for beer.”

Group 6: ≥ 51 years of age, heavy drinkers

"I think it's clearer than the other ones because all the information is in one place, you're not looking at 5% alcohol here and a bit over here, it's all in one label, I still question why we've got both kilojoules and calories, because I think they're the same thing."

Group 6: ≥ 51 years of age, heavy drinkers

"I like it because it's in one spot, in one group and you don't have to go looking for it all over the bottle, it's just so good being right there."

"Same, I like it all good together, sometimes I find the writing is really tiny sometimes and it's hard to find what you're looking for."

"...Again, I'm just thrown off by that DI, I guess it's a pet peeve all of a sudden I never knew I had."

Group 1: 18 to 25 years of age, mild/moderate drinkers

In addition, because the energy content information was in the same location as % alcohol content and standard drinks, participants suggested they would be more likely to read and take in the energy information. That is, they would see the energy content while they were seeking out the other information.

"Its influence is a bit higher because of where it is.....if you are only interested in one you are forced to look at the other two because they are so close together."

"...like planting a seed where you probably don't care much about it, but you still know it...and every time you drink it is there again. It might influence my drinking a little bit. Not hugely, but enough..."

Group 7: Māori, mixed age, heavy drinkers

Likely impact of the labels on consumer behaviour

For all labels, beyond taste and price, **participants stated they would look at the standard drinks or % alcohol content labels first, rather than the energy content**, indicating that the energy content labels would have little influence. Some felt energy content was only "for health freaks" or those people who are "concerned about their weight," and did not find the information personally relevant.

Some participants said they would change their purchase behaviour or consumption because of the labels. The reasons given for their change in behaviour included:

- being given information about energy content (and motivated to track their calorie or kilojoule consumption)
- having energy content information available might influence them to pick one drink over another.

Heavy drinkers, particularly people in the two older groups, were much less likely to say that any of the labels would influence their purchase or their consumption (unless they were calorie-oriented).

“I don’t think beer is really thought of as something that’s healthy anyway, so I feel if people are drinking beer they kind of knowingly accept that it’s probably bad for them anyways.”

“Generally when you go out to drink, you don’t really knowingly go into it looking at all of the ingredients, you’re drinking and don’t care. Especially as the night goes on.”

“Liquor is already bad for you, it’s not exactly good for you so what’s a bit more sugar?”

Group 2: 18 to 25 years of age, heavy drinkers

Standard drinks

As all four labels included the standard drinks icon and % alcohol content, this prompted discussion among the focus groups on standard drinks. One group of younger drinkers were startled to discover how many standard drinks were in a bottle of vodka. Older drinkers discussed how a standard serve for wine might vary and cited examples they had experienced at various bars and restaurants.

“I’m sure I only get five glasses out of a bottle of wine and that’s probably based on the wine glasses I use.”

“Wine glasses are bigger now.”

“Yeah, 8 really? That sounds a lot, so I find it very useful.”

Group 6: ≥ 51 years of age, heavy drinkers

Some participants indicated that the standard drinks information was likely to influence their behaviour, as it served as a guide to how much or how little they could drink.

INFORMATION TO INCLUDE ON ENERGY LABELS FOR ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

At the start of the focus groups, when labels were first introduced, participants talked about making a choice that is about pleasure or indulgence rather than health. When alcoholic beverages were contrasted with non-alcoholic beverages, drinkers did expect the same types of information to be available.

The group of Māori participants, in particular, reacted strongly to hearing that alcoholic beverages were not required to display ingredients or an NIP. This group felt that alcohol should carry the same types of health warnings as other dangerous consumptions (e.g. tobacco products). The participants emphasised the importance of having nutrition and health information so that consumers have the opportunity to make better, more informed decisions about the products they purchased.

“I think that it’s ridiculous that they don’t put it [full labels] on alcohol. It is the same as cigarettes having all those ridiculous pictures all over them, alcohol bottles should have the same.”

Group 7: Māori, mixed age, heavy drinkers

“...everything that is required for food labelling should be required for alcohol...would be a good idea to help people make better informed decisions.”

Group 7: Māori, mixed age, heavy drinkers

Participant-designed labels

When asked to write what types of information they wanted on labels for alcoholic beverages, most participants favoured adding more information, rather than the status quo. Participants liked having more information available if they wanted it. Older drinkers, in particular, were keen for much more information (including ingredients). Information desired by participants included:

- brand name, variety, ingredients, volume, where bottled and made
- % alcohol content, sugar and energy content
- how many drinks they could have before they were over the limit
- standard drinks
- health warnings and risks
- nutrition information.

Each participant created their ideal label, shared it with others in their group, and then voted on their favourite label. Labels were mostly hand drawn, but participants could also cut and paste parts from the different label options onto their drawings. **Most participants preferred bottles to have both front and back labelling.**

“If the issue is alcohol and calories, then comparing life-like, supermarket shelves, you can see that that has less alcohol and calories than that, you’d make a choice based on that, but if you wanted to know all of the issues, and the detail, but again you’re not going to stand in the supermarket and turn around each bottle and scan it or you’re going to start getting odd looks from people and so I think it’s what issue are you trying to address with the label.”
“If you’re worried about your calories, you might narrow it down to a couple and then you look at it and make a decision based on what is on the back.”

Group 6: ≥ 51 years of age, heavy drinkers

“Sometimes it feels like you’re getting lectured by beer if it’s all on the front, do you know what I mean?”

Group 4: 26 to 50 years of age, heavy drinkers

In addition, some participants felt that **if the energy information was only present on the back of the bottle, it would likely go unnoticed** and people would not be prompted to consider different choices they might make. Participants also commented that they were unlikely to spend time in a purchasing scenario looking at the back of bottles. Despite the negative appraisal of the NIP earlier in the focus group, the majority of participant wanted to retain the detail provided in the NIP as part of their ideal label.

“I think all the detail should be on the back, but the main information when it is easy to read like this, it should be on the front. I just think like sometimes the standard drinks thing, like sometimes this information is tiny at the back and you don’t bother looking because it is not right in front of your face, but if that was right in front of my face I would be more likely to go and read it.”

Group 7: Māori, mixed age, heavy drinkers

A consistent theme across the groups was a preference for **simple, clear and easy to find information on the front**, with more **detailed information on the back**.

Participant discussions also raised the need for the label to be **visually appealing** as well as **easily understandable** to all consumers. Participants also noted the importance of placement of the label on the bottle. While they thought that placement needed to be 'noticeable', there was a tension for some participants where prominent placement leads to a certain discomfort and might disrupt the product design and, therefore, their enjoyment of the product.

"...understand...but also educating the people about what one standard drink is."

Group 3: 26 to 50 years of age, mild/moderate drinkers

"...when they make the label, less is more."

Group 1: 18 to 25 years of age, mild/moderate drinkers

"Make the information more understanding to audiences because that's a lot of information on there, but it doesn't sound like a lot of people know what the information is for and how you actually translate it into what you're taking out."

Group 2: 18 to 25 years of age, heavy drinkers

Impact of the sugar infographic

At the end of the focus group participants were given a poster showing the relative energy content of different alcoholic beverages and mixers (Appendix 4). The sugar infographic used sugar cubes to demonstrate the energy content of each beverage, with each sugar cube representing 84 kilojoules or 20 calories.

Prior to the introduction of the sugar infographic, sugar was discussed spontaneously and regularly by participants throughout the focus group discussions. Most participants had an immediate reaction to the sugar infographic, which was seen as more useful than the label information that had been provided previously (including the sugar content within the NIP).

"Actually see how much sugar. Visually seeing how much sugar there. That would make me look at it, because trying to counteract how much sugar is in calories and that for me is doing nothing without that there. That would make me think twice."

Group 7: Māori, mixed age, heavy drinkers

Some participants commented that they had shifted from calories to sugar (which is “something real”) in their own diet management.

“For me sugar is something real, it’s something I can see and understand, whereas calories and kJs and carbs for me are phantoms, I mean people talk about them all the time, I’ve heard it before but I don’t actually understand what that is, so for me sugar is real, I can see a cup of sugar, I know exactly what it is, ..”

Group 3: 26 to 50 years of age, mild/moderate drinkers

“Yeah I sometimes look at the ...years and years ago I always used to look at the kilojoules or calories or energy output, but then I think I really didn’t understand it so then I started looking more recently at how much sugar is in it, and the different.... I’ve forgotten what are the bad fats, so probably more the sugar and if there were two products sitting there, I sometimes pick them up and compare the two and get the one with less sugar.”

Group 3: 26 to 50 years of age, mild/moderate drinkers

Four key themes arose from showing focus group participants the sugar infographic:

- **The infographic is an accessible reference point for drinkers.** Sugar was viewed as much more tangible than an abstract notion of calories or kilojoules, and they can relate to both the concept and are more likely to change their behaviour due to its presence. Having a tangible point of reference helps.
- **Visualisation makes information processing and comparisons easier.** Participants could immediately see how much energy was in each drink, and could easily compare drinks.
- **Potentially influential in shaping public thinking.** Participants had a stronger reaction to the sugar cube representation than the numerical representations of the same information. This highlights the importance of providing not just information, but providing the information in a way that is easy for consumers to interpret.
- **Visual representations of energy content, such as the sugar infographic, may have more influence on heavy drinkers.** Heavy drinkers in the study were resistant to messages about health and alcohol, and less likely to state that energy labelling would

impact their behaviour. However, the heavier drinkers appeared more responsive to the sugar infographic than messages about energy content. This finding should be interpreted with some caution, however, as participants tended to conflate energy with sugar, rather than associating the energy content with alcohol itself.

DISCUSSION

This study is the first to qualitatively assess New Zealand consumers' awareness of the nutrition/energy content of alcoholic beverages and their views on energy labelling for alcoholic beverages. Of note was that terms such as kilojoules, calories, % DI and standard drinks were abstract concepts to the majority of participants and, therefore, confusing and not well understood (except by those who were heavily engaged with dieting and/or physical activity).

Furthermore, people were generally unaware of the energy content of alcoholic beverages. This is consistent with previous findings, which found poor nutrition literacy with respect to alcoholic beverages (Bui et al., 2009). Discussions around energy content tended to focus on sugar, suggesting that participants were not aware the main source of energy in these beverages was the alcohol itself.

In general, the participants in our focus groups expressed a preference for enhanced labelling of alcoholic beverages. That is, participants wanted more information on alcoholic beverages rather than the status quo. This information was not limited to energy content, but also included ingredients, allergy information and health warnings. The possibility of health warnings was one of special significance to Māori participants and may reflect a growing emphasis in Māori communities on strategies to improve health. Although health warnings were not being explored in the current study, research from Australia and Canada suggests that such warnings would be valued by consumers and have the potential to influence behaviour (Victoria Health Promotion Foundation, 2009; Vallance et al., 2018).

Most participants did not perceive either the NIP or % DI as providing useful information. In particular, % DI was described by participants as unhelpful and potentially misleading. Similar findings have been reported regarding food and non-alcoholic beverages, where labels using % DI are less preferred than those presenting the same information in other formats that may be easy to interpret and apply (Gorton, Ni Mhurchu, Chen, & Dixon, 2008).

Of the four labelling options presented, the most favoured label featured the energy icon combined in a single label with % alcohol content and standard drinks. Participants favoured this label because of the ease of understanding and the placement of the energy information alongside other information (i.e. % alcohol content). By placing the energy content information in the same place as the alcohol content information (rather than placing it on the back of the bottle or in a separate label), consumers may be less likely to avoid this information. Although

participants preferred this label, many stated that it would not influence their purchase behaviour or alcohol consumption, and, therefore, the label was not seen as 'ideal'. In most cases, participants' ideal labels included both front and back labelling, with most participants retaining an NIP in spite of the low perceived usefulness of this information.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

The research outlined in this report is qualitative in nature and, as such, the findings are restricted to the views and experiences of those who participated in the focus groups (which may not be representative of the wider population). It should be noted that while qualitative research can be used to identify a range of issues and assess the intensity with which views are held, quantitative research is necessary to establish with certainty the extent to which the views expressed are held throughout the wider population. The focus group methodology used in this study does not allow quantitative analysis of participant's views or opinions by demographic characteristics.

An additional limitation of the study is that Prime Research found it difficult to recruit participants that met the criteria for mild/moderate drinking. As a consequence, seven people included in the mild/moderate drinking groups (three in group 1, three in group 3, and one person in group 5) had AUDIT-C scores 1-2 points above the cut-off for mild/moderate drinking (i.e. they were at the lower end of the heavy drinking category). Furthermore, the Māori-only group was intended to include people with mild-to moderate alcohol use. However, only heavy drinkers could be identified for the group.

CONCLUSION

Overall, participants found that none of the presented labels were ideal, and all would have little influence over purchasing or consumption of alcoholic beverages for the majority of participants. Regardless, participants expressed preference for more information on alcoholic beverages, rather than the status quo. Based on participant feedback, energy labelling needs to be placed primarily on the front of the bottle, be visually engaging, simple, tangible, require no calculation, should not look like a 'wine award' label, and should enable easy comparison between different types of alcoholic drinks. For energy labelling to impact behaviour it needs to be presented in a more concrete or tangible way, using a format that allows easy comparison between different alcoholic beverages. However, for such labels to be effective in curbing alcohol-related harm they should be seen as part of a package of evidence-based interventions that address the

wider influences on drinking behaviour, as well as increasing awareness of harm. Further research is needed to identify a label that resonates with, and is understandable by, the majority of alcohol consumers. Findings from this study has informed phase two of the research - an experimental study of alcohol energy labels, which aims to quantify the effects of four different types of energy label on consumers' purchase behaviour, estimation of energy content, and overall attitude towards alcohol consumption.

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APPENDIX 1: LABELLING OPTIONS



LABEL 1: Back of bottle NIP

Product name: Original Refreshing Beer

Nutrition Information		
Servings per package: 1		
Serving size: 330mL		
	Average qty per serving	Average qty per 100mL
Energy	385kJ (92 Cal)	117kJ (28 Cal)
Protein	1.3 g	less than 1 g
Fat, total - saturated	less than 1 g less than 1 g	less than 1 g less than 1 g
Carbohydrate - sugars	1.5 g less than 1 g	less than 1 g less than 1 g
Dietary fibre	less than 1 g	less than 1 g
Sodium	15 mg	4.5 mg

Container volume: 330mL

Alcohol content: 5% Alc

Standard drinks icon: 1.3

Best before date

LABEL 2: Front of bottle icon (no DI)



Product name:

Brand, Wine type, Wine of New Zealand

Container volume: 750mL

Alcohol content: 13.5% Alc



Standard drinks:

8.3



LABEL 3: Front of bottle icon (DI)



Product name:

Brand, Wine type, Wine of New Zealand

Container volume: 750mL

Alcohol content: 13.5% Alc



Standard drinks:

8.3





LABEL 4: Combined Label

Product name: Vodka

ENERGY
273 kJ
65 Cal
3% DI*
Per 30 mL serve

47% Alc
* based on an average adult diet of 8700 kJ

APPROX. 37
Standard Drinks™

Alcohol content: 47% Alc

Standard drinks icon: 37

Energy content per serve:

273 kJ, 65 Calories

Container volume: 1000mL

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Instructions for interviewer

How to use this guide?

- This guide contains 4 parts and 18 topics.
- Most topics are introduced (*Italics*). Read these introductions out loud.
- Topics are formulated as open questions (**bold**). Read these questions out loud.
- Some topics include prompts (underlined). These can be used to encourage participants and facilitate the group discussion. Only use these prompts when participants don't bring up the subjects themselves.
- The symbol ☞ indicates where you need to provide an instruction, prompt, or summary.

What do we mean with “energy” in alcoholic drinks?

- With “energy” we mean “kilojoules (kJ)” or “calories”.
- All alcoholic drinks are made from natural starch and sugar.
- Additional calories can be present in added mixer drinks.
- As a result alcohol contains lots of calories

What is the relation between alcohol and weight gain?

- Regularly drinking can have a noticeable impact on bodyweight as well as cause less obvious but more serious health problems.

Provide information about help with alcohol drinking behaviour

- Please inform all participants that they can contact their GP if they wish to receive any help with their drinking behaviour;
- Also inform them they can contact the Alcohol Drug Helpline 24/7 on:
0800 787 797 or <http://alcoholdrughelp.org.nz>. Emphasise that this service is free and available to all participants.
- We don't expect you to provide any advice regarding the participant's health or drinking behaviour during the focus group

Part 1: AWARENESS OF ENERGY CONTENT OF ALCOHOL

☞ *“Welcome/Kia ora. The main purpose of this group discussion today is to talk about the “energy” content of alcoholic drinks. With “energy” I mean “kilojoules (kJ)” or “calories” which are the units used to measure energy. A bit like how “kilograms” or “pounds” are used to measure weight.*

Topic 1: First I would like to ask you, what do you know about the energy (kilojoules or calories) content of alcoholic drinks, such as wine, beer and spirits?

☞ Prompt I: Worksheet (Appendix 3). Underneath each drink, I want you to estimate how many calories or kilojoules are in each one. One calorie is about the same as four kilojoules. Kilojoules are the measure used on food labels in New Zealand

☞ Prompt II: Where do you think the energy in alcohol comes from?

Topic 2: Does drinking alcoholic drinks affect your weight? Why?

Topic 3: Do you ever compensate for the number of calories you’ve consumed by drinking alcoholic drinks?

☞ Prompt I: By eating less food?

☞ Prompt II: By exercising more?

☞ Prompt III: Other?

Part 2. PERCEIVED USEFULNESS OF LABELLING

☞ *“Now think about the product you usually buy when doing your weekly grocery shopping”*

Topic 4: How and where would you find information about what is in a food or beverage product?

☞ *“Almost all food and drink products you buy in the supermarket or dairy have a label on it listing all its ingredients. They usually look like this (show an example of a Nutrition Information Panel and ingredients list).”*

Topic 5: Have you ever read these labels? Why?

Topic 6: How useful do you find these labels?

Topic 7: Does the information on these labels influence you?

☞ Prompt I: To buy the product?

☞ Prompt II: If so, what do you look for in alternative products?

☞ Prompt II: Other?

☞ “At the moment most alcoholic drinks are required to show the alcohol content of the drink. However, they are not required to display an ingredients list or a nutrition information panel label”.

Topic 8A: Have you ever noticed this?

Topic 8B: What are your thoughts on this?

Topic 9: What information would you like to see on a label on an alcoholic drink, such as a bottle of wine, a can of beer or a bottle of spirits? Please write down or draw on the sheet the information you would like to see on the label of an alcoholic drink about what is in the drink

☞ Prompt 1: Alcohol content

☞ Prompt 2: Energy (kilojoule/calorie) content

☞ Prompt 3: Carbohydrates

☞ Prompt 4: Sugar content

☞ Prompt 5: Number of standard drinks contained

Topic 10: What information would be most likely to influence your decision to buy or consume the product? Why?

☞ Prompt 1: Energy (calories), carbohydrates

☞ Prompt 2: Warnings

☞ Prompt 3: Drinking advice

☞ Prompt 4: Other

Topic 11: What information about the energy content of alcohol would be most likely to influence your decision to buy or consume the product? Why?

☞ Prompt 1: Calories

☞ Prompt 2: Kilojoules/kJ

☞ Prompt 3: Sugar content

☞ Prompt 4: Carbohydrates

☞ Prompt 5: Other

Topic 12: Would any information on a label on alcoholic beverages influence your decision to buy or consume the product? Why?

Part 3. EXAMPLES OF ENERGY LABELS

☞ *“I will now show you different types of possible energy labels for alcoholic drinks. For each label I would like to know what your thoughts are.”*

☞ Discuss topics 13 to 17 for Figures 2, 3 and 4 (Appendix 1)

Topic 13: How useful do you find the information on this label?

Topic 14: Would this label influence your decision to buy or not to buy the alcoholic drink? Why?

Topic 15: Would this label influence your drinking behaviour?

☞ Prompt 1: Drink less alcohol overall

☞ Prompt 2: Drink less alcohol on one occasion

☞ Prompt 3: Drink a different alcoholic beverage than usual (completely or partially), e.g. a lower alcohol beverage

☞ Prompt 4: Stop drinking alcoholic beverages completely

☞ Prompt 5: Stop drinking alcohol on one occasion/ in one circumstance

Topic 16: Would this label have an influence on anything else you do?

☞ Prompt 1: How much exercise you do?

☞ Prompt 2: How much you eat?

☞ Prompt 3: How much water you drink?

Topic 17: Where on the alcoholic drinks container you would like to see the label?

☞ *For the last section, I am going to ask you to break into pairs. I am going to ask each pair to come up with an ideal label. You have a new type of drink and a range of possible information you could choose to put on a label. What would you put on the label for people like yourselves?*

Part 4. CLOSE

☞ Give a summary of what has been discussed.

☞ Present sugar infographic (Appendix 4)

Topic 18: Is there anything else you would like to suggest or recommend with regards to labelling information on alcoholic drinks?

☞ *Thank you all very much for your time today. Your input into this group discussion is valued highly. Today we talked about your alcohol drinking behaviour.*

We have been chatting tonight about alcohol, and these types of discussions are always a chance to reflect and think about how much we drink. When you leave, there will be a thank you for your time. There will also be a page given to you which will have the details for

a) *A quiz to see how much you are drinking <https://www.alcohol.org.nz/help-advice/is-your-drinking-ok/is-your-drinking-okay-test/the-test>*

b) *If you are at all concerned about how much you are drinking - please contact your GP or the Alcohol Drug Helpline on: 0800 787 797 or <http://alcoholdrughelp.org.nz>. And these details will be on the paper given to you.*

APPENDIX 3: ENERGY CONTENT WORKSHEET



Beer
330 mL

Red wine
125 mL

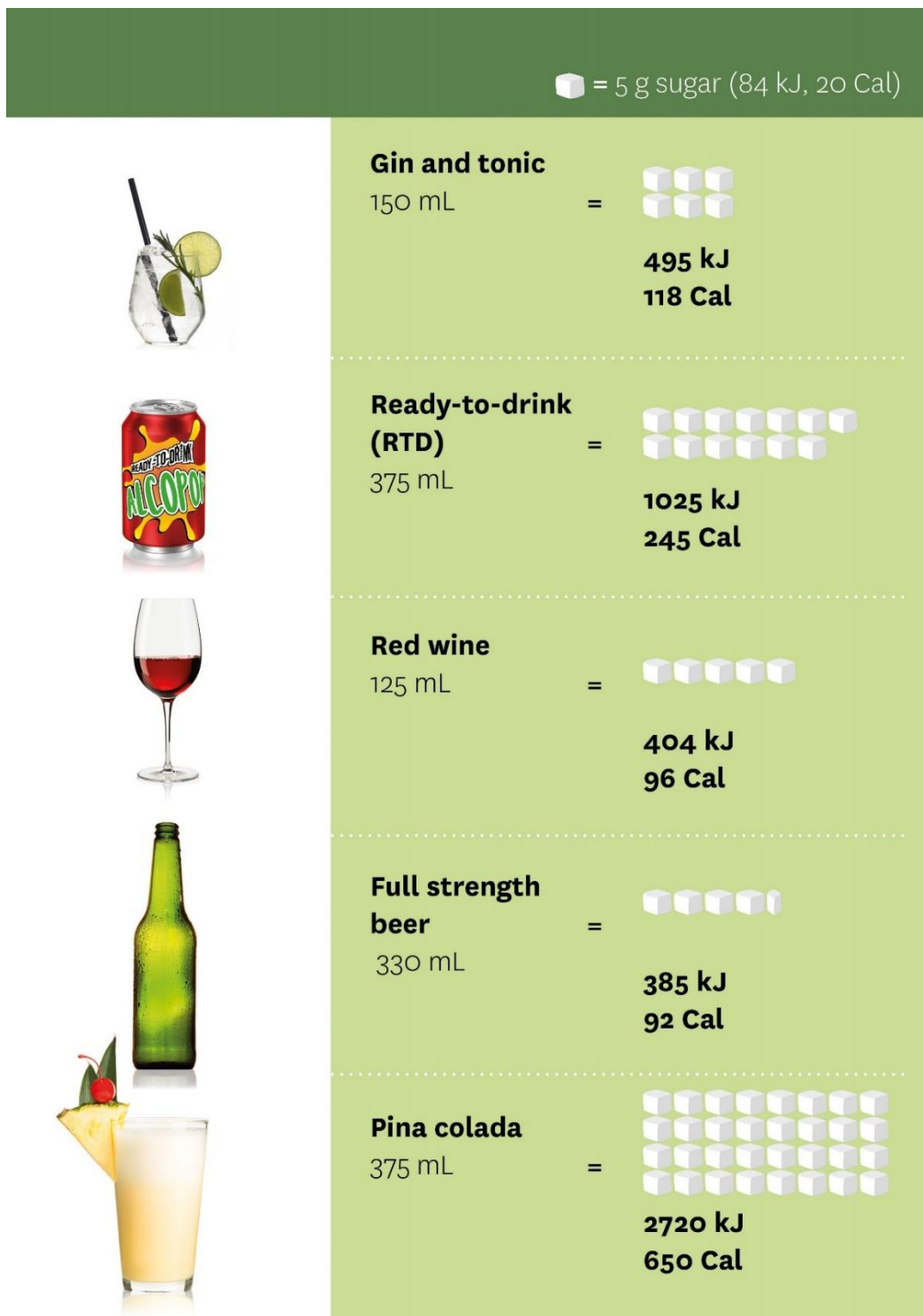
**Ready-to-
drink (RTD)**
375 mL

**Shot of
spirits**
30 mL

**Sparkling
wine**
125 mL

APPENDIX 4: SUGAR INFOGRAPHIC

Comparison of energy in alcohol beverages, using sugar cubes.



APPENDIX 5: PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

	18-25 years mild/moderate drinkers [§] (n=5)	18-25 years heavy drinkers (n=5)	26-50 years mild/moderate drinkers [§] (n=5)	26-50 years heavy drinkers (n=5)	≥ 51 years mild/moderate drinkers [§] (n=5)	≥ 51 years heavy drinkers (n=5)	Māori, mixed age, heavy drinkers [@] (n=5)
Age (years)							
Mean, range	21 (18-23)	21 (19-23)	40 (28-46)	35 (28-50)	61 (52-78)	58 (51-71)	40 (24-59)
Gender							
Male	2	3	3	3	2	3	3
Female	3	2	2	2	3	2	2
Ethnicity*							
Māori	1	1	0	0	0	0	5
Pacific	1	1	0	3	0	2	0
Non-Māori non-Pacific	3	3	5	2	5	3	0
Highest qualification							
Secondary school only	2	3	2	1	0	2	2
Tertiary or trade	3	2	3	4	5	3	3

Total household income								
< \$80,000	4	2	3	1	2	4	3	
≥ \$80,000	1	3	2	4	3	1	2	
AUDIT-C score**								
Mean, range	3.4 (2-5)	7.6 (6-10)	3.8 (2-5)	7.8 (7-9)	2.6 (2-3)	8.0 (6-11)	7.0 (5-10)	

*Ethnicity prioritised by Māori, then Pacific, then Non-Māori non-Pacific

** Scores of <3 for women and <4 for men = mild to moderate alcohol use; Scores of ≥3 for women and ≥4 for men = heavy alcohol use (Towers et al., 2011).

§ Due to difficulties in finding people with mild to moderate alcohol use, this group included some individuals with AUDIT-C scores 1-2 points above the cut-off for mild/moderate drinking (i.e. they were at the lower end of the heavy drinking category)

© This group was meant to include a mix of mild-moderate and heavy drinkers. However, due to difficulties in finding people with mild to moderate alcohol use, this group ended up only including individuals with heavy alcohol use.