

Children's Rights Alliance

PRESS RELEASE

19 April 2004

For Immediate Release

Alliance Expresses Severe Disappointment at Draft Children's Advertising Code

The Children's Rights Alliance today expressed its severe disappointment with the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland's draft children's advertising code and strongly criticised the Commission for failing to adequately address the rights and needs of children.

"The code should prohibit commercial broadcast advertising to children under the age of 12 and ban the advertising of junk food and alcohol products by broadcasters in Ireland, said Raymond Dooley, Chief Executive of the Children's Rights Alliance. In failing to take these steps, the Commission is missing a golden opportunity to put in place genuine protections for children".

"The Commission's decision to put off any substantive regulation of junk food advertising for another year effectively places the economic interests of the relevant industries ahead of the important health rights of children", said Dooley.

Obesity and illnesses, such as type II diabetes, linked to a poor diet represent a growing public health problem in Ireland and a threat to the well-being of children. The type of food that is promoted in advertising is often greatly at variance with the requirements of a nutritious diet, as recommended by public health experts.

"Broadcast advertisements for 'junk food' show unhealthy foods in the best possible light. Fatty and sugary foods are associated with popularity, happy playground relationships and sporting success. In contrast, foods that feature in diets recommended by nutritionists get little promotional support through advertising", according to Margaret Burns, Honorary Secretary of the Alliance.

The Alliance also criticised the lack of any new restrictions in the code on alcohol advertising. "Given the devastating health impacts associated with the abuse of alcohol and the dramatic increase in the consumption of alcohol products in Ireland in recent years, particularly among young people and children, it is entirely unacceptable that no meaningful steps have been taken to curb the promotion of alcohol products and to reduce the pressure to drink", according to Dooley.

" Research has shown that advertisements for alcohol were perceived by young people as promoting a desirable lifestyle and image, as portraying alcohol as a gateway to social success, as helping to provide confidence and social skills and to enlarge one's circle of friends, as increasing sexual attractiveness, and as giving people more energy."

"How many more studies are required before meaningful action is taken? The same type of courageous public health policymaking displayed in relation to tobacco control should now be applied to the advertising and promotion of alcohol products, regardless of the political clout of the drinks and advertising industries," said Dooley.

The Alliance welcomes the restrictions of the use of celebrities, sports stars or children's heroes to promote food or drink. In addition, the Alliance welcomes the provision that prevents the portrayal of a child in a sexually provocative manner or provokes anxiety in a child over their bodily appearance.

The Children's Rights Alliance had called on the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI) to ban all commercial broadcast advertising targeted at children under the age of 12. The Alliance had also called for a ban on junk food and alcohol advertising.

The Children's Rights Alliance is a coalition of 75 non-governmental organisations concerned with the rights and needs of children. The Alliance works to secure the full implementation in Ireland of the principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

For more information, contact: Sarah Benson 087 9273542, email sarah@cra.iol.ie