

Department of Health to assess effect of alcohol ad ban

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The Department of Health is to commission an independent regulatory impact assessment (RIA) of its plan to ban the advertising of alcohol products.



(Image: Wikimedia Commons)

Late in November, it quietly asked service providers to submit proposals for a regulatory impact assessment by Thursday last week. It said the assessment should be completed within three months from the date on which the contract was awarded, include a cost-benefit analysis and cost no more than R500,000.

This implies a considerable delay in the processing of the Control of Marketing of Alcoholic Beverages Bill, which anti-alcohol campaigner Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi is determined to get onto the statute books.

Dr Motsoaledi has said he is "unapologetic" about the consequences of the alcohol advertising ban, adding that alcohol is a key risk factor in the growing burden of non-communicable diseases facing SA.

The draft bill has already taken three years to get to Cabinet. It was first contemplated in 2010, when an inter-ministerial team was established to investigate the proposal.

Cabinet approved the draft bill in September but it was not clear at the time whether it also decided that a regulatory impact assessment should be conducted.

The terms of reference for the regulatory impact assessment said the proposed legislation "is aimed at reducing alcohol-related harm from a health, social development, economic, violence and crime, road traffic, gender issues and other points of view".

The regulatory impact assessment would consider the compliance and implementation costs of the proposed law and examine alternative options to achieve the same objective.

SABC could be hit hard

The outcome of the assessment could help settle the dispute between the departments of health and social development, which want to limit the misuse of alcohol, and the economic departments, which are worried about the adverse economic effects of a ban.

Communications Minister Yunus Carrim has expressed concern about the potential loss of revenue the South African Broadcasting Corporation could suffer because of a ban on alcohol advertising and has stressed the need for the "right balance" to be found.

The Department of Sport and Recreation is also worried about the "severe" consequences a ban would have on the development of sport in SA.

The alcohol industry and other interested parties such as the media and sports bodies have lobbied for a regulatory impact assessment to be undertaken. The industry believes 12,000 direct jobs will be lost through a ban on alcohol advertising.

The government estimates the "tangible" cost to the country of alcohol abuse is R38bn a year in terms of alcohol-related violence, injuries, deaths, disease, losses to the economy, lost productivity and law enforcement. The intangible costs could be as high as R240bn.

Social Development Minister Bathabile Dlamini told the media in September during a briefing on the draft bill that "the harmful use of alcohol has significant negative effects on individuals, families, communities, the economy and the country as a whole.

"Alcohol advertising still glamorises and encourages the use of a product that causes serious harm to individuals and to society and, despite claims from the industry that children and youth are not targeted, international research indicates that advertising does influence child and youth behaviour."

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