



## Regulating Consumptogenic Systems

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Excess consumption by industrialised societies is harming human health and destroying the planet. This workshop brings together scholars from across Australia to explore ways in which to regulate systemic and individual level consumption. A meta-synthesis of the discussions will be published in a journal and translated to policymakers, nongovernmental organisations, and civil society actors active in this area.

The objectives of the workshop are to

1. Identify the relationship between excess consumption of various commodities and resources and the impact on population health and the natural environment
2. Explore various psychosocial, political, economic, and market theories that can help make sense of the policy processes, social structures, and individual behaviours driving consumptogenic systems and environments
3. Discuss examples of regulatory approaches used to address consumption in the context of population health and the environment
4. Identify theoretical and empirical gaps in the evidence base, with the goal of developing a research agenda

Consumption has been characterized as the "the heroin of human happiness". The commercialisation of human desires to consume and exert status by capitalist structures that encourage the consumption of cheap, disposable goods facilitated by technological advancements and a global labour supply have created a perfect storm for an "overdose". The rising level of excess consumption has contributed to some of the greatest challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including climate change and a global epidemic of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs).

Consumptogenic systems are ones that promote the consumption of goods and services to the detriment of either population or environmental health. These systems are generally associated with developed capitalist economies. Excess consumption is arguably a product of societal pressures from cultural and economic actors encouraging market transactions to individual consumers that forge daily routines around consumption, trading money for goods and symbols to reflect their social status. An emphasis on the consumptogenic system attempts to shift the focus away from just individual choices to consume to the structural conditions that enable and promote excess consumption<sup>4</sup>.

Consumption may be harmful to health either due to the nature of the commodity itself (e.g. tobacco) or due to excess consumption of it (e.g. alcohol, sugar). Consumption and overconsumption, particularly of harmful commodities, generally begins in more affluent populations; however, as information becomes available regarding the risks of these behaviours, these populations have the resources to modify their consumption patterns in accordance with health-promoting recommendations. At the same time, the social gradient of risk begins to shift as these commodities become more affordable to lower socioeconomic segments of the population, who in turn increase their consumption while also lacking the financial resources to address any negative health externalities. Simultaneously, what society produces and consumes, including fossil fuel reliant - health harmful commodities, is responsible for up to 60% of global greenhouse gas emissions and between 50 and 80% of total land, material, and water use. Within a country it is the poorest segments of society that are most vulnerable to climate change<sup>6</sup> as witnessed by the recent string of climate-related environmental disasters in the US.

Tackling climate change and rising NCD rates will require dramatically reducing consumption of goods and resources. Discussions that bring together knowledge across the social sciences of regulatory strategies to tackle the issue of consumption will be critical to finding solutions to this complex problem that lies at the nexus of multiple crises within health and the environment.