

Selling the Drink, Hiding the Risk: How Alcohol Marketing Obscures Cancer Risk in Brazil

Why It Matters Now

Cancer cases are projected to nearly double globally by 2050. In Brazil, the increase is expected to be even steeper: The National Cancer Institute projects an 85% rise in new cancer cases and more than 90% increase in cancer deaths by 2050.

Alcohol is a preventable risk factor, along with tobacco use, responsible for nearly 700,000 cases globally each year. Yet, many people are not aware that alcohol causes cancer.

Brazilians' knowledge of alcohol as a cancer risk factor

A 2026 survey found:

- **71%** of people identified alcohol as a cancer risk factor vs. **91%** for smoking
- **63%** of people under 24 identified alcohol is a cancer risk factor vs. **75%** of those 60+

Source: Vital Strategies, Umane and Instituto Deive. More Data Better Health: Brazilian people's perceptions of risk factors for cancer. June 2026.

These gaps are not accidental. The alcohol industry has a documented pattern of sowing doubt about cancer and other harms caused by its products to protect its market and profit.

Many Brazilians are willing to reduce their alcohol consumption, and governments have the evidence-based tools needed to create the environments to enable this behavior change. WHO's SAFER package identifies higher taxation and restrictions on advertising and alcohol availability as among the most cost-effective policies available.

What is Canary?

Canary is a real-time media monitoring and reporting service that harnesses AI and expert analysis to identify emerging threats in digital environments.

This snapshot draws on Canary evidence from social media and digital news to show how the alcohol industry glamorizes its products and obscures their links to cancer and other health harms in Brazil, highlighting the need for government-led policy that counters this messaging and reduces consumption.

We find that the industry:

- Makes direct health claims (low calorie, gluten free) that obscure the risk by suggesting alcohol-containing products are "healthier."
- Reformulates products with added vitamins or protein to reach fitness- and health-minded consumers.
- Sponsors sports events and celebrity athletes to glamorize products and align them with fitness and achievement.
- Deliberately targets young people, who are less aware of alcohol's link to cancer.



Marketed as a "superior light beer" for active, fitness-minded consumers despite its 4.2% alcohol content (ABV), Michelob Ultra sponsors the Rio Marathon's full 42K distance, featured prominently in this Instagram post as the 2026 winner celebrates his athletic achievement.

Source: maratonadoriooficial Instagram

Can You Tell Alcohol Is Harmful From the Way the Industry:

Makes claims to create a "health halo" around products

Using calorie counts and other health claims on products that still contain significant alcohol content creates a "health halo" that lets brands more easily infiltrate fitness and wellness spaces, despite the harms their products pose to health. This messaging is then reproduced in the media, confusing consumers.



Source: [amstelbr](#) and [brumfotosport](#) Instagram

Amstel Ultra (4.0% ABV) markets "30% fewer calories" than regular Amstel and suggests in the caption that "Life is happier with a toast after the race," part of a broader pattern of encouraging runners to consume its beers at the finish line. The brand sponsors running events across Brazil, including São Paulo's Corrida do Orgulho, where it distributes products to runners, and AMB Run, enabling it to associate its products with fitness.



Source: [stellaartoisbrasil](#) and [gugakuerten](#) Instagram

Timed to Stella Artois' sponsorship of Roland Garros (the French Open), the Brazilian tennis legend Gustavo "Guga" Kuerten was brought on as a brand ambassador. Campaign content centered on the "Pure Gold" line, promoted as gluten free and lower calorie than regular Stella Artois beer, a health-forward framing that—paired with its placement on the tennis court—implies a fitter choice despite the product's 4.3% ABV.



Source: [A Gazeta](#) article

A Gazeta, the largest news and entertainment portal serving Espírito Santo state, published a roundup of low-calorie beers. The piece reinforces the confusing message that "lighter" beer supports a healthier lifestyle, with no mention of alcohol's health harms like cancer.

Beyond Claims: Alcohol Companies Frame Products as Functional Foods



Source: [beerprotein.official](#) Instagram

Beer companies are now reformulating alcoholic and nonalcoholic beer alike with ingredients borrowed from sports nutrition and wellness products—protein, vitamins and collagen—so products can claim to not just be “healthier,” but as actively contributing to a healthy diet.

A small Brazilian beer brand introduced the concept of protein beer locally, and later in 2026, the alcohol giant Ambev's product entered the Brazilian market. Beer Protein, promoted as Brazil's first protein beer, adds 10g of protein to an alcoholic beverage (4.6% ABV), with three cans described in the media as surpassing a typical scoop of whey. This seizes the “protein craze” taking over the internet fitness community and encourages beer consumption among health-conscious consumers, despite the cancer risk it carries.

Sponsors sports events and celebrity athletes to glamorize its products

Alcohol brands sponsor elite sporting events and partner with celebrity athletes to borrow their prestige and project a sense of health, despite alcohol being fundamentally at odds with good health.



Source: [amstelbr](#) Instagram

Amstel sponsors both the men's and women's Copa Libertadores tournaments, South America's biggest football competition. In this post, Corinthians players help the brand promote the lead-up to the women's tournament, bringing a beer cart onto the pitch.

In October 2025, Amstel co-produced the HBO Max documentary “De Virada,” spotlighting women in Brazilian football, timed to coincide with its “Libertadores Feminina” sponsorship—positioning the brand as a supporter of women in sport.



Source: [O Tempo](#) article

Brahma, one of Brazil's most popular beers, has partnered with football legend Ronaldo Nazário since 1998. Ronaldo is now the spokesperson of Sociedade Anônima Brahma (SAB), a campaign launched in 2025, which donates a percentage of Brahma sales made through the Zé Delivery platform to the buyer's designated favorite football club.

In its first three months, SAB raised more than R\$3 million for Brazilian clubs, a result framed as “fans investing in their teams with Brahma.” This mechanism directly ties beer consumption to football club loyalty, letting fans feel like buying beer is a form of supporting their team, while obscuring the health risks it carries.

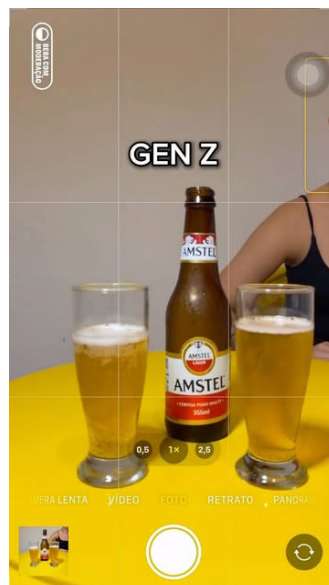


Source: [coronabrasil](#) and [wslbrasil](#) Instagram

Corona uses its nonalcoholic variant, Corona Cero, to sponsor the World Surf League through 2028. Surfing carries strong associations with fitness and outdoor health culture, which the brand borrows directly through the sponsorship and the "This Is Living" tagline. While the product itself remains nonalcoholic, it shares similar branding with the full-strength beer, thereby potentially extending brand loyalty to its alcohol products.

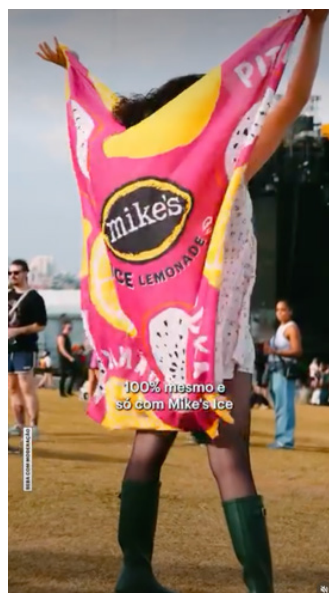
Deliberately targets young people, who are less aware of alcohol's link to cancer

Young people are a prized audience for the alcohol industry and are frequently exposed to glamorous alcohol marketing, which may further obscure their understanding of the link between alcohol and cancer.



Amstel promotes its products as being for all age groups from Gen Z to Boomers. Its ads explicitly claim younger demographics, who are less aware of alcohol harms, as part of the brand's audience.

Source: [amstelbr](#) Instagram



Mike's Ice Lemonade, an alcopop which tends to be popular among youth, held a named stage at Lollapalooza, the gigantic all-ages festival. On-site activations included branded cangas (beach towels), rain ponchos, cups and a custom photo sticker station.

Source: [mikesbr](#) Instagram



Cachaça Seleta promotes a cotton candy-flavored hard liquor recipe—a flavor strongly associated with childhood. Flavoring alcohol to taste like sweets is a well-documented tactic to make products more palatable to younger people with less experience consuming alcohol, who tend to prefer sweeter tastes.

Source: [cachacaseleta](#) Instagram

The Bottom Line: What the Data Say

- **Alcohol is a Group 1 carcinogen** and is causally linked to at least seven cancers, including breast, liver and bowel cancer ([International Agency for Research on Cancer](#)).
- **Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Brazil**, behind cardiovascular disease ([National Cancer Institute](#)).
- Brazil is projected to see **781,000 new cancer cases** annually between 2026–2028 ([National Cancer Institute](#)).
- Cutting average alcohol intake by just one beverage per day (~330ml beer, ~12g alcohol) could prevent **157,400+ cancer deaths in Brazil** by 2050 ([Vital Strategies](#)).
- **76%** of Brazilians are in favor of policy measures that reduce alcohol consumption, with **62%** supporting price increases ([Vital Strategies/RESET Alcohol](#)).

Key Takeaways

The alcohol industry obscures its products' links to cancer and other health harms by making health claims that suggest products are "healthier," sponsoring sports events and celebrity athletes that enable products to be aligned with fitness and achievement, and targeting young people who are less aware of the alcohol-cancer link.

For the public: Alcohol consumption causes cancer. When the alcohol industry promotes its products in glamorous places and by glamorous people, remember what this marketing is working to obscure.

For researchers: There's clear data on the link between alcohol and cancer, but more evidence is needed to quantify this burden in Brazil. This data can help make the case for stronger alcohol policy that reduces cancer risk.

For decision-makers: Brazilians are willing to cut back alcohol consumption. Governments can help them by creating enabling environments that disincentivize consumption. WHO's SAFER package offers a road map with evidence-based policies to reduce consumption and signal alcohol's harms.

About Canary!

Canary is a real-time media monitoring and reporting service that harnesses AI and expert analysis to identify emerging threats in digital environments. This brief primarily relies on data collected between 2024 and 2025 from alcohol company/brand social media accounts and related digital news media in Brazil, with supplementary examples from 2026. For more information on our methodology, visit our [website](#).

About Vital Strategies

Canary is a project of [Vital Strategies](#), a public health organization that partners with governments and local organizations to tackle the growing burden of noncommunicable diseases and injuries, using data and evidence to assess health and environmental threats and to move policy, practices and people. Our team of 400+ includes epidemiologists, policy experts, communicators, data analysts and others who work in 80+ countries around the world.

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