

## Background

Alcohol is among the leading preventable risk factors for diseases and death worldwide. It causes harm to health, families, communities, and national development, and results in some 2.6 million deaths worldwide every year. Alcohol also plays a significant role in a range of social issues including homicide, violence against women, child abuse, suicide, car crashes and falls. It's also a significant contributor to the toll of noncommunicable diseases, specifically: liver disease, heart disease and seven types of cancer including mouth, throat, larynx, esophageal, colorectal, liver and breast.

RESET Alcohol seeks to tackle this burden by bringing together national governments, civil society, research organizations and global leaders in public health and alcohol policy. The aim is to develop and implement evidence-based alcohol policies, specifically through raising taxes and other targeted efforts to reduce marketing and availability. The initiative is led by Vital Strategies in collaboration with country partners and global technical partners, including Johns Hopkins University Economics for Health, Global Alcohol Policy Alliance, Movendi International and the Pan American Health Organization. Priority countries include Brazil, Mexico, South Africa and the Philippines.



### Population

216,284,000 (UN, June 2023)

### Total Alcohol Per Capita (APC) in liters of pure alcohol, 15+

13.4 l (Males), 2.4 l (Females) (2016)

### Prevalence of heavy episodic drinking (HEC), 15+

32.6% (Males), 6.9% (Females) (2016)

## A three-pronged communication strategy shed light on the harms of alcohol in Brazil, leading to government action on taxes.

Vital Strategies Brazil and its partners, ACT Promoção da Saúde (ACT Health Promotion) and Universidade Católica de Brasília (UCB), utilized a successful three-pronged plan that included providing timely research on alcohol taxation, an evidence-based media campaign and an earned media strategy to bring attention to the need for tax increases on alcohol in Brazil.

The effort was timed to coincide with a historic tax reform on the overall tax code across Brazil that included a provision for taxes on unhealthy commodities including alcohol, ultra-processed foods and tobacco. The reform of the tax system was 40 years in

## RESET Alcohol Case Study: Brazil



The Dose of Reality campaign in Brasilia was shown on one of Latin America's largest billboards.

the making and it provided a long-sought opportunity to address the health and social harms of unhealthy products in the country.

Since 2018, Vital Strategies has supported civil society partners to promote the idea that unhealthy commodities should be part of the Brazilian tax reform as a critical means to reduce the harms and lessen the costs and lost productivity that these unhealthy products cause.

At the end of 2023, legislation for this historic overarching tax reform was approved by the Brazilian legislature, clearing the way for excise taxes on unhealthy products. At this juncture, Vital Strategies Brazil and its partners sprang into action to ensure complementary legislation slated for 2024 establishing a new tax structure would include a specific tax based on the volume of alcohol in alcohol products.

Compared to other types of taxes on alcohol, taxes based on volume are well established as an international best practice because they drive up the price of all alcohol, ensuring fewer low-priced products are available. They are also generally easy to administer and are proportional to the harm of a product.

Starting before the tax reform was approved RESET partners came out loud and clear with their message: effective excise taxes are powerful public health and

fiscal tools. They also drove home examples of the most effective tax strategies from other countries.

To do so, ACT, UCB, along with Vital Strategies Brazil, met with critical members of the executive and legislative branches and tax authorities, to make a clear and urgent case about alcohol's societal harms and the need for an excise tax.

Throughout, alcohol industry lobbyists persistently sought to dilute the reform's public health measures to protect their profits. To safeguard the tax, RESET partners focused on raising concerns about the health risks linked to alcohol products in an appeal to the public and stakeholders.

Finally, in 2024, ACT and the Vital Strategies Brazil communication team executed a robust integrated strategy in two phases – in July and November - timed to support passage of volume-based excise taxes in the two houses of the National Congress and to raise public concern.

### Phase I: A Targeted Mass Media Campaign

A mass media campaign, “Uma Dose de Realidade” (A Dose of Reality), highlighted the harms of alcohol by graphically depicting its link to violence, cancer and other diseases.

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Campaign materials were created by the Brazilian agency Moringa to put the subject of alcohol harms on the public agenda and to encourage parliamentarians to support the tax. The first phase of the campaign strategically focused on Brasília, the nation's capital, and aired just before the tax vote by the Chamber of Deputies.

Billboards were placed where parliamentarians live and work, and the campaign was broadcast on one of the largest LED panels in Latin America. A social media strategy rounded out the campaign, along with interviews and mentions on the main news and political channels in Brazil.

Campaign messages were developed based on a survey on public attitudes about alcohol and support for alcohol policy, commissioned by Vital Strategies across five countries, including Brazil. For example, upon finding that 93% of Brazilians “consider alcohol a serious problem” the campaign addressed what had been identified as top-of-mind alcohol-related public concerns for Brazilians: Domestic violence, road crashes and liver disease.

A direct message geared toward parliamentarians was also included in the campaign: If alcohol has a negative impact on society, it should be taxed accordingly. The first campaign aired for one month and reached almost 3 million people.

### Public Relations Strategy

PR efforts ensured the poll results and news of the campaign launch were widely disseminated. The story was picked up by the country's most important papers, including [Folha de São Paulo](#), [Estadão](#) and [Poder 360](#). A [website](#), launched in conjunction with the campaign, featured relevant research, fact sheets on alcohol policies and details on alcohol's social and health impact.

On the day of the vote in the Chamber of Deputies, an op-ed was published in the leading economic newspaper, *Valor Econômico*, signed by Pedro de Paula, Vital Strategies Brazil Country Director. *Valor Econômico*, the country's leading publication on the economy and business, is read by opinion leaders, executives, investors, and government. Metrics suggest the op-ed reached about 370,000 Brazilians. The excise tax vote passed the lower house.

### Phase II: Next up, the Senate

As in the first phase of the campaign, Phase II relied on research data, including a new study commissioned by Vital Strategies Brazil from the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz) entitled “Estimation of the direct and indirect costs attributable to alcohol consumption in Brazil.” The study revealed that alcohol use costs Brazil R\$ 18.8 billion per year and is responsible for 12 deaths an hour.

An evaluation of the first phase of the campaign materials helped refine the second phase. This time, the campaign used images that were easier to understand and focused on beer, the most widely consumed alcohol beverage, combined with messages about the cost of alcohol to Brazilian society. This campaign also specifically targeted the Senate – which was about to vote on the tax.

Phase II of the campaign aired in Brasília, São Paulo and Rio on TV, radio, in newspapers, outdoor and on digital media, to reach Senators and the public.

The launch of the second phase and the release of the Fiocruz cost study on November 5 resulted in more than 600 media stories in the first three days. This time the campaign reached more than 28 million people and generated more than 71,000 visits to the website. This marked an unprecedented amount of attention according to Vital Strategies Brazil and ACT, compared to other recent campaigns on critical public health issues, including the impact of Covid on chronic diseases.

The outpouring of media attention in phase II was equivalent to nearly R \$5 million (about USD \$850,000) in free advertising. Stories appeared in all 27 Brazilian states. These numbers are even more impressive considering the launch was the same day as the presidential election in the United States.

RESET partners successfully developed and proposed amendments to strengthen the alcohol tax. Among these were the inclusion of an annual inflation index adjustment and a provision ensuring revenue wouldn't be reduced during the transition from the current taxation model to the new one, to ensure no reduction on alcohol taxes during any transition period. Finally, provisions that could undermine the effectiveness of the excise tax were also removed.

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Phase II materials aired in Brasília, São Paulo and Rio.

Powerful partners including civil society groups, academia, ministries of health and justice, and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), collaborated closely to provide a united approach on all fronts of the project. Notably partners coordinated when participating in Senate public committee hearings on the health burden of alcohol.

Shortly following the run of the second phase of the campaign, the Senate also agreed to the legislation that included specific taxes. By mid-December, there was agreement on the final legislation between both houses of the National Congress. The President signed the tax legislation into law on Jan 17th.



Some of the main articles about this work are available from [Folha de São Paulo](#), [O Globo](#) and [CNN](#).

A post-campaign evaluation of the second phase found that those who were aware of the campaign thought it was “easy to understand” (93%), “believable” (88%) and “relevant” (84%). The evaluation also found that those who saw the campaign were more likely to support government action to implement higher taxes on alcohol, compared to those who were unaware of the campaign.

In 2025, RESET partners in Brazil have turned their attention to informing the tax rate debate to ensure taxes are high enough to reduce alcohol harms.

### About Vital Strategies

Vital Strategies is a global health organization that believes every person should be protected by a strong public health system. We work with governments and civil society in more than 73 countries to design and implement evidence-based strategies that tackle their most pressing public health problems. Our goal is to see governments adopt promising interventions at scale as rapidly as possible. To find out more, please visit [www.vitalstrategies.org](http://www.vitalstrategies.org) or Bluesky [@vitalstrategies.org](https://bsky.app/profile/vitalstrategies.org)