

Northwest Directors of Public Health

Position Statement: Alcohol

Rationale

Northwest Directors of Public Health are aware of and concerned with the wide range of alcohol-related harm that is experienced by people across, Cumbria and Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Cheshire and Merseyside. We recognise that alcohol use is a major risk factor for numerous health conditions, injuries, and social problems. Additionally, alcohol-related harm costs the health sector significant money, time and resources. And we know that the burden of this harm is not carried equally across our communities.

As such, alcohol harm reduction is a priority for Directors, Health Care Partnerships, and many Health and Wellbeing Boards across the Northwest. Through collaborative work with partners, we will deliver targeted prevention initiatives to help improve lives and ultimately achieve a reduction in alcohol specific admissions to hospital.

This strengthens our support and commitment to the aspirations set out in the Association of Directors of Public Health Position Statement (2017). This called for a whole system approach, including the NHS, and provided compelling evidence for actions on taxation and pricing, licencing as well as marketing and labelling of alcohol.

Summary of Evidence Alcohol Related Harm, we know that

- Alcohol is a risk factor for numerous health conditions, injuries and social problems
- In 2021 in Cheshire and Merseyside there were 1,201 deaths attributed to alcohol. This represents 4.3% of the total 28,154 deaths registered.
- In the same period, in Cumbria and Lancashire there were 991 deaths attributed to alcohol. This represents 4.1% of the total 23,910 deaths registered. (Note that this is the whole of Cumbria and Lancashire combined, not the smaller Lancashire & South Cumbria ICB area.)
- And in Greater Manchester there were 1,245 deaths attributed to alcohol. This represents 4.6% of the total 26,895 deaths registered.
- Harm results from intoxication and includes road traffic injuries and fatalities, burns, falls, drowning, poisoning, assault, self-inflicted injury, suicide and homicide.
- Alcohol affects the brain. It alters the mood and impairs memory and psychomotor function.
- Alcohol is a risk factor in major diseases, including heart disease, cancer, psychiatric and neurological conditions, gastrointestinal disease, and birth defects.
- It also contributes to diabetes, sleep disorders, and infectious diseases such as pneumonia and tuberculosis.
- Unborn children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the effects of alcohol. Unborn children exposed to alcohol are at high risk of problems with memory, language, attention and learning. Adolescent brains are still developing and therefore vulnerable to alcohol toxicity, addictive problems and psychiatric disorders.
- Alcohol also plays a significant role in crime and disorder
- Alcohol use can be harmful to our friendships and relationships.

- *Before the pandemic it was estimated that alcohol misuse across Cheshire and Merseyside cost £412 per head of population to the NHS, social services, crime and licensing, and the workplace. Applying that estimate to 2021 mid-year population estimates would suggest a cost to Cheshire and Merseyside of £1.039 billion, to Cumbria and Lancashire of £0.84 billion and to Greater Manchester of £1.182 billion. This sums to a cost of £3.06 billion for the North West region. Applying the £412 per head cost estimate to the population of England in 2016 produces an estimated national cost of £22.8bn. This is less than half of one of the national estimates that featured in a PHE evidence review on alcohol harm published in 2016, which might suggest that our sub-regional estimates could be considered conservative.*

Our Commitment

1. Is to reduce the alcohol-related harm experienced by people within the Northwest.
2. Directors of Public Health will support and assist Integrated Care Boards to develop local alcohol plans that seek to reduce alcohol-related harm.
3. We will advocate for comprehensive national policies that
 - Add the protection of public health to the 4 existing licensing objectives (Licensing Act 2023)
 - regulate the marketing of alcoholic beverages (in particular to younger people);
 - regulate and restrict the availability of alcohol;
 - enact appropriate drink-driving policies;
 - reduce demand through taxation and pricing mechanisms;
 - raise awareness of the health and social problems for individuals and society at large caused by the harmful use of alcohol;
 - ensure support for effective alcohol policies;
 - provide accessible treatment for people with alcohol-use disorders; and
 - implement screening and brief intervention programmes in health services for hazardous and harmful drinking.

This together with local interventions will

Make our communities safer; - by protecting the health, safety and social wellbeing of those who drink alcohol and those around them.

Manage availability, price and promotion; - by reducing opportunities for availability, promotion and pricing contributing to risky alcohol consumption.

Support individuals and their families to obtain help; - by facilitating access to appropriate treatment, information and support services.

Promote healthier communities; - by improving the understanding and awareness of alcohol-related harms in our communities.

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