



Delivering Dry January® in your community

August 2022

About us

Alcohol Change UK works for a society that is free from the harm caused by alcohol. We create evidence-driven change in five key areas: improved knowledge, better policies and regulation, shifted cultural norms, improved drinking behaviours, and more and better support and treatment.

Find out more: alcoholchange.org.uk/

About this handbook

The aim of this handbook is to provide you with some ideas for how to organise a successful alcohol public health campaign in your local area for Dry January®.

What we are offering here are some ideas based on our experience of what has worked well, and suggestions for approaches for you to try.

Acknowledgments

Dry January® would be nothing without its participants and supporters. Alcohol Change UK would like to thank all those who have shared their experiences of Dry January® with us, and the residents of Fishguard and Goodwick in Pembrokeshire, who took the time to give Dry January® a go in their community and to give us their views on the campaign. These stories and comments have helped to inform this handbook.

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About Dry January®.

Dry January® is the UK's one-month alcohol-free challenge run by us, Alcohol Change UK. Every year, tens of thousands of people across the UK go alcohol-free for 31 days, using the tools and resources provided by us. The campaign began in 2013 and has been growing ever since, with 130,000 people taking part in January 2022. As we head into its tenth anniversary year, we are encouraging organisations such as yours to come together to help people in your community to drink more healthily.

Why take part in your community?

Learning new information and having a moment to reflect are key steps in deciding to make a behaviour change. For some individuals, your campaign could be the impetus that motivates them to make lasting change.

Healthier year-round drinking

An alcohol-free month has lots of benefits. A month off alcohol can lower blood pressure and cholesterol, and help you sleep better, lose weight, and save money. More importantly, [evidence shows](#) that people who do Dry January® with support from Alcohol Change UK are still drinking more healthily and report higher levels of wellbeing six months later.

Why sign up?

People who sign up to Dry January®, using Alcohol Change UK's tools and resources, are twice as likely to have a completely alcohol-free month and have significantly improved health and wellbeing and healthier drinking six months later.

Tailored support

Alcohol Change UK offers a free app, [Try Dry](#), which allows people to track their units, calories and money saved through Dry January®, and to set custom goals for managing their drinking year-round.

We also offer our daily motivational emails throughout the month, and an active online community. Those who take on Dry January® with this support [are twice as likely](#) to have a completely alcohol-free month compared to those taking on Dry January® alone, and have significantly improved wellbeing and healthier drinking six months later. In January 2022, 130,000 people used the app, with tens of thousands continuing to use it throughout the year.

Who is Dry January® for?

Dry January® is for anyone who feels like they're drinking a bit too much, or too often ... or just feels like they could do with some time off from alcohol. It's particularly effective for increasing risk and high risk drinkers.

Lower risk, increasing risk, and high risk drinking:

- Lower risk drinking is not regularly consuming more than 14 units per week
- Increasing risk drinking is regularly drinking 15 to 34 units a week for women, or 15 to 49 a week for men
- High-risk drinking is anything above that level

Warning about alcohol dependency

Although Dry January® is safe for most people, it isn't right for anyone who is alcohol-dependent. If an individual is experiencing physical symptoms when they stop drinking, they should seek medical help urgently.

Warning message about alcohol dependency

If, after a period of drinking, you experience any of the following symptoms, you may be dependent on alcohol and you should NOT suddenly stop drinking completely:

- seizures (fits)
- hand tremors ('the shakes')
- sweating
- seeing things that are not actually real (visual hallucinations)
- depression
- anxiety
- difficulty sleeping (insomnia)

But you can still take control of your drinking. Speak to a GP or local alcohol service who will be able to get help for you to reduce your drinking safely. [Find out more about getting some support.](#)

Getting started

At its simplest, an alcohol public health campaign can be about creating a display to raise public awareness using posters and resources provided by us. We have some ideas for how you can do this below.

Ideas for if you're low on resource

If you are low on time and resource or need some further inspiration, look no further! Take part in Dry January® using our free digital resources.

Our free digital resources will be sent out in the autumn to all those who sign up to the campaign. Listed below are some of the ways you can get people involved.

Encourage sign ups to Dry January®

Encourage people in your community to [download our Try Dry app](#) or [sign up for coaching emails](#) and help them double their chance of having a totally alcohol-free month and get the amazing, lasting benefits Dry January® can bring. The app also allows people to set custom goals for managing their drinking year-round.

People who sign up receive:

- **Daily motivational emails.** These have high open and engagement rates throughout the month.
- **Our free Try Dry app.** The app helps people to measure and manage their drinking during January and throughout the year.
- **Access to an online community** of others taking part in Dry January®. This remains available and active year-round.

- **Spread the word on social media and elsewhere.** Use our social media images and messaging across your channels and join us in getting people thinking about their drinking.
- **Create a display.** Put our posters on display online and out in the local area. Share them with your local places so they can display them too. Think about displaying where people already gather – venues, bus stops, reception areas and waiting rooms and website landing pages.
- **Create a press release using our template.** Share the messages and the success of your campaign throughout your local media and news. Our template should make this simple to put together, especially if you're looking for some guidance.
- **Get businesses to let you know if they are providing low and no-alcohol options.** Create a list to share with local residents, so they can feel confident when they turn up at local places that they are going to be comfortably catered for.

Community-based approach

If you have more time, you may find a community-led approach offers even greater rewards.

Here are a few tips – based on our experience – about how to set up an alcohol public health community initiative in your local area.

Connecting with your community

There are all sorts of different communities. We've found that some of the best events are aimed at anyone who lives in the local area. This 'place-based' approach can attract a wide range of people who might never normally meet and generate interesting and unexpected conversations.

So thinking about what alcohol means in your community and considering the best groups to connect with is a great place to start.

Once you've picked your community group(s), it's worth thinking about what might matter to them: what are their interests and concerns, and what would make a Dry January® campaign interesting to them? It might be the chance to get fitter, to get out of some deep-seated habits, or just the chance to get to know the neighbours better.

Setting the right tone

Alcohol can be a sensitive subject, and no one likes to feel like they are being told what to do. So it's worth involving some of the group from the start to set the right tone. People will have different levels of enthusiasm and commitment to the campaign, and need to feel that they can decide what will work for them.

"I assumed it would be preaching about not drinking...but it seems to be far more about bringing the community together."

To attract the widest possible range of participants, you need to be clear from the start what the campaign is about, and what it's not about. The Dry January® campaign is not anti-alcohol but more about giving us a pause for thought to consider our drinking. All of the resources we offer include positive, non-preachy messaging. This leaves the door open to involve local shops, pubs, clubs, bars and other venues that rely on selling alcohol for their livelihood.

"Not sure if I will keep it going but I will definitely cut down."

Get yourself connected

A campaign needs participants. But how do you find them? Leaflets, posters and social media can help to get you started, but a particularly effective way to encourage people to get involved in a community event is word of mouth: either face-to-face or online, via someone they know and trust. Some people are obvious 'community connectors', such as a local politicians and radio presenters, and they're often worth approaching. The personal endorsement of a well-known local figure like this can be invaluable.

But it's not all about celebrities. Everyone can be a connector: someone who knows people who know other people.

Many people will be part of existing community networks – such as sports clubs, faith communities and interfaith groups, exercise and weight loss groups. Linking up with established groups like these is much better than trying to create your own network from scratch.

They may not have any specific focus on alcohol issues, but they will be full of people who have experience of the role alcohol plays in their community. If you can present Dry January® to them as an opportunity they can shape according to their own priorities, they may be willing to help you get the word out and attract other people to take part.

Take your time

Building the sort of relationships that form the basis of a successful community initiative can take time.

So, if you're short on time, you might want to focus more on supporting the group to raise awareness of the issues and providing them with some resources that they can share.

If you do get time to work more collaboratively with an existing network, you will also have to factor in time to listen to what's important to them too and continue the dialogue with a view to taking on board some of their ideas in the future.

Expect the unexpected

Campaigns work best when they grow from the ground up. Dry January® is a framework within which all sorts of community-based activities are possible. Some of the unexpected alcohol-free activities we've helped people organise over the years have been:

- walking football
- tea dances
- intergenerational IT sessions
- battle of the bands
- walking tours with poetry readings

These are just a few examples – there are more ideas in the sections that follows, and people in your community will have all sorts of ideas of their own. So, be ready to listen and to try things you didn't expect. In fact, the business of getting people together to talk about what to do, and then doing it, can bring real long-term benefits in terms of connecting people with those around them – benefits that can last beyond the timespan of any one campaign.

Branch out

There are some places where people expect to come across a public health campaign like Dry January® – such as a pharmacy or a doctor's surgery. These venues work very well, particularly as people are often actively seeking out health information and advice. But it's also worthwhile looking outside of these local places by bringing your campaign to the attention of people who aren't looking for it at all.

One way of meeting people who aren't expecting you is to show up somewhere unexpected. Think about venues that are popular locally but wouldn't normally be used for a health-related project. One obvious option is a pub or club where people normally go to drink (such as a rugby club). Most licensees recognise their role in the community and are keen to carry it out responsibly. They may also realise that it makes good business sense to improve their offer to moderate drinkers and non-drinkers.

Some ideas for events

The shape of your local Dry January® campaign will depend on what the participants want to do. Here, we'd like to offer a few examples of the types of events that we have found have worked well.

A beer festival with no booze

"Finding tasty alcohol-free beers at the festival made all the difference. Now I can drink with friends and those of us who aren't on alcohol don't feel left out."

Alcohol-free drinks have been shown to be helpful to many individuals wishing to reduce their alcohol consumption. Alcohol-free beers, wines, ciders, and even spirits have come a long way in recent years. By organising a festival with free samples of a range of drinks, you can help people give them a try. We've found that once people get taste-testing, they're often pleasantly surprised.

You'll find some great no-alcohol and low-alcohol drink reviews on [our website](#) to help you get started.

"It's a total surprise how tasty they are. With these drinks, it would be much easier to go alcohol-free."

Again, it's worth thinking about unexpected places to hold your festival: places people gather but wouldn't necessarily expect to come across Dry January®. Some possible locations include:

- Established community festivals and events – such a food festival, farmers' market or arts and crafts fair – where you can set up a market stall to offer drinks samples.
- Sporting venues, such a local football or rugby club, where you can catch people prior to the match and at half-time.
- Local drinking venues such as pubs and clubs, possibly during a normally quiet time of the week, when the licensee may be glad of some new customers.

If you're able to offer food as well, alongside the drinks, that always helps draw a crowd! And if you can offer anything for free that's even better.

Sport for all

Sport can be a great way to look after our physical and mental health, and a great way to socialise and relax. But a lot of us lack the confidence to get out on the pitch and show off our less-than-perfect sporting skills. That's why a number of new sports have been developed in recent years in which many more of us can participate without embarrassment.

One great example is walking football. Invented in 2011, it's football with one simple extra rule: players must have one foot on the ground at all times. This slows the pace and means that the game can be played by mixed teams of any gender, children and adults together, and by people with limited movement. It's hard to think of a more sociable and more inclusive form of exercise! You can play it on more or less any open space. You can make it as competitive or as light-hearted as you like. And all that walking around (and shouting from the sidelines) is bound to make people thirsty, which means you and your Dry January® champions can be on hand with alcohol-free refreshments.

Exhibitions

Pop-up exhibitions are great for catching people's attention. If a space has changed or something is new, then people want to have a look and see what's going on.

Why not create some pop-up art exhibitions in your community? They can be a real crowd pleaser, as well as being a great conversation starter.

Winter Olympics

Arrange a family friendly winter Olympics to get people out and enjoying themselves for an alcohol-free activity.

Call on local partners to help with this – gyms, leisure centres, sports clubs! It may not sound high-impact but if you run this 'tournament style' it could give people the chance to attend a whole series of activities, that are not alcohol-focused; this all supports with making new routines and for some, learning how to explore social activities without alcohol being a key factor.

Next steps: Get your resources

Throughout the month of January local areas across the country run events and displays using free downloadable resources provided by Alcohol Change UK. These free printable resources will be available in autumn 2022.

Resources include:

- Posters
- Factsheets
- Social media images and template posts
- Template press release
- Pack of ideas for running Dry January® in your workplace

Pick up some great offers in our shop

We also have some great complementary printed resources available in our online shop for you to order for your displays.

- **Our ever-popular scratchcards.** This simple quiz acts as a great conversation starter and helps to tell people if they are at risk of alcohol harm by answering three simple questions (based on the official AUDIT-C tool created by the World Health Organisation). A total score of 5 or more can indicate increasing or higher risk drinking.
- **Posters.** Our Dry January® posters will be available to download for free but we will have a set of printed versions ready to go if you're short on time. These will be available to buy in our shop for a small fee from the autumn.
- **Dry January® mugs.** If you are running a Dry January® event in your community or workplace, the Dry January® mug is a great feature for your displays and is a great gift or prize for anyone taking part.
- **Dry January® calendars.** Order a pack of Dry January® calendars and encourage those taking part to tick off their dry days and enjoy the amazing benefits of a month off alcohol. Past Dry January participants told us: 86% saved money, 70% slept better, 65% had better health, and 54% lost weight.
- **Dry January® pin badges and wristbands.** The Dry January® pin badge or wristband is a great way to show your support for the campaign while raising vital funds in helping to reduce the harm caused by alcohol.

[Sign up for your free resources.](#) Visit our [online shop](#) to find out more.

Stay in touch

There are many ways to organise Dry January® in your community as there are communities in the UK. We've set out the benefits of running a campaign and some ideas for getting started, but we'd love to hear about your ideas too, and what other communities can learn from your experiences. Send us your ideas, stories, images and videos, so we can get sharing: contact@alcoholchange.org.uk.

Contact us

If you'd like to find out more about running an alcohol public health campaign in your community, please get in touch: contact@alcoholchange.org.uk.

Thank you!

Alcohol Change UK works to significantly reduce serious alcohol harm in the UK. We create evidence-driven change by working in five key areas: improved knowledge, better policies and regulation, shifted cultural norms, improved drinking behaviours, and more and better support and treatment.

Visit us: www.alcoholchange.org.uk

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