

# Alcohol Change UK submission to the Women's Health Strategy call for evidence

June 2021

[www.alcoholchange.org.uk](http://www.alcoholchange.org.uk)



"I believe that alcohol harm should be at the heart of the health strategy because there are swathes of the population, especially women, who are drinking at harmful levels as a way to release the stress of juggling family life and work. This is a hidden problem and one that will cost lives in the long run. It's that drink at the end of the day, that 'sip sip aaaah' moment when the kids are in bed. It would be fine if it was just 1. Usually, it's not because it's so easy to slip into having 2 and more when no one else is watching.." – Amanda, Sussex

Alcohol Change UK is a leading UK alcohol charity. With a vision of a society that is free from serious alcohol harm, we work towards five key changes: improved knowledge, better policies and regulation, shifted cultural norms, improved drinking behaviours, and more and better support and treatment. We are a research funder, we deliver the annual Dry January campaign and we provide training to client-facing professionals through our award-winning Blue Light project. We welcome the opportunity to make representation to the call for evidence on the Women's Health Strategy.

## Key points

- Alcohol is a significant cause of women's ill health, disability and early death.
- While women drink less than men overall, many conditions specific to women are caused or exacerbated by alcohol.
- Women are at greater risk than men of some of alcohol's harmful effects, including liver cirrhosis, hepatitis, alcohol-related cancer (including mouth, oesophagus, liver, and breast) and cardiovascular conditions like stroke.<sup>1</sup>
- The Women's Health Strategy must address the impact of alcohol on all health conditions that affect women, including by endorsing policies that reduce alcohol consumption across the population.

## 1. Women's consumption of alcohol

*"My mother is 89 and an alcoholic. It's the family's hidden secret and the stress of dealing with this has ruined my life."* – Jane, North East

Alcohol use damages health, causes and increasing number of early deaths, and ruins lives. The harms caused by alcohol have been thoroughly described in the recent report of the Alcohol Harms Commission, *'It's everywhere – alcohol's public face and private harm'*.<sup>2</sup> The total cost of alcohol harm to the UK is estimated at between £27bn and £52bn a year.<sup>3</sup>

A recent study found that 1 in 10 hospital inpatients is alcohol dependent, while a huge 1 in 5 is drinking harmfully.<sup>4</sup> While 71% of drinkers in England do drink within the low risk drinking guidelines of 14 units a week,<sup>5</sup> 1.9 million people drink at higher risk levels and 8.5 million at increasing risk levels and there are around 590,000 dependent drinkers in England.<sup>6</sup>

The Health Survey for England tracks alcohol consumption trends. In recent years it has shown a fairly stable picture, finding that 78% of women drank alcohol in 2019 compared to 80% in 2012.<sup>7,8</sup> The most recent (2019) survey found that while 20% of women did not drink, and most (62%) drank at lower-risk levels, a worrying 15% drank at increasing- and 3% at higher-risk levels.<sup>9</sup>

The coronavirus pandemic has had a serious effect. Studies have shown that a significant minority of people have increased the amount they drink since the beginning of the April 2020 lockdown, and there has been an increase in the prevalence of higher risk drinking.<sup>10</sup> Public Health England's Wider Impacts of Covid on Health

monitoring tool shows that the proportion of adult women drinking at increasing- and higher-risk levels (above 35 units per week) has risen from 3.9% before lockdown to 5.5% during the April 2020 restrictions, peaking at 7.2% under the December tiers system.<sup>11</sup>

There follows an outline of the particular impacts of alcohol consumption on women’s health, which must be addressed throughout the Women’s Health Strategy. The list is not exhaustive, as alcohol affects the whole body and reduction of consumption across the population should be an aim of all health strategies and policies.

## 2. Alcohol and mortality

Alcohol is the leading risk factor for premature mortality and disability among those aged 15 to 49 years.<sup>12</sup> Recent data from the Office for National Statistics show that: “there were 7,423 deaths (13.0 per 100,000 people) from alcohol-specific causes registered in 2020, a 19.6% increase compared with 2019 (6,209 deaths; 11.0 per 100,000 people) and the highest annual total in our time-series (beginning in 2001).”<sup>13</sup>

Women’s alcohol-specific mortality rates are at their highest for at least two decades.

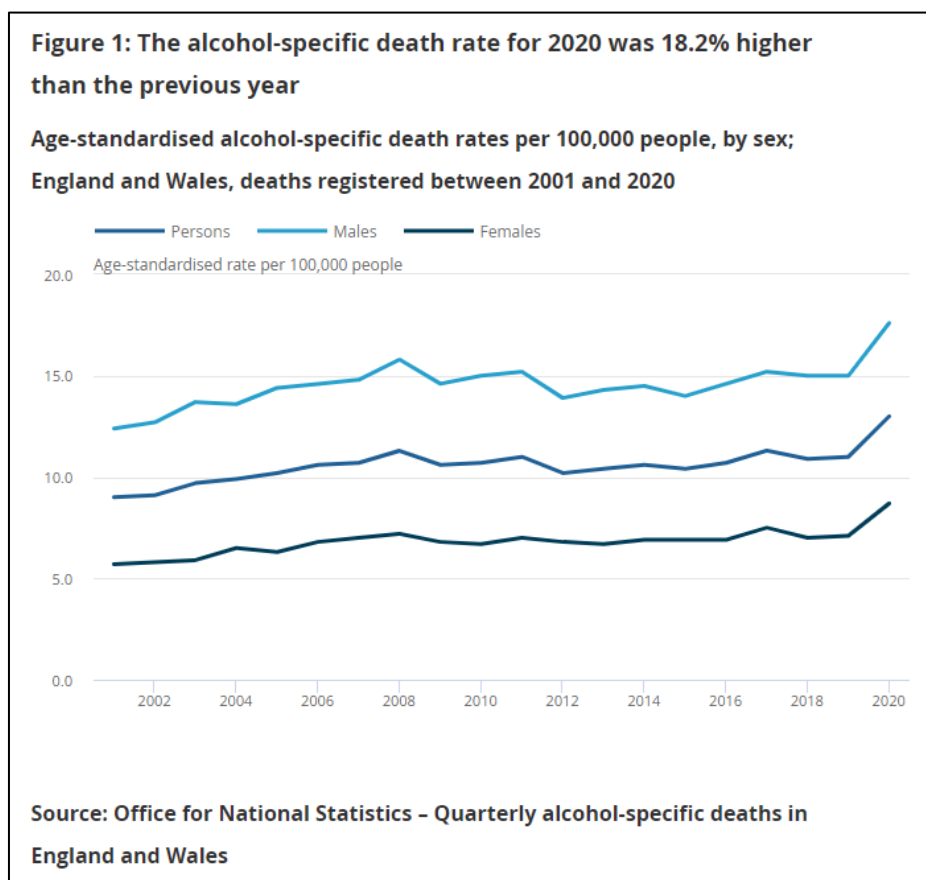


Chart reproduced from Office for National Statistics<sup>14</sup>

## 3. Alcohol and cancer

*“My Mum and Mum in law have become alcoholics in later life. I have had breast cancer and didn’t realise my over drinking could have caused it.” – Beth, Norfolk*

Alcohol is a grade 1 carcinogen in the same category as tobacco, causing around 12,000 cases of cancer in the UK each year, including around 4,400 cases of breast cancer.<sup>15,16,17</sup> Women face greater risk than men of alcohol-related cancer, including cancer of the mouth, oesophagus, pharynx, larynx, liver, bowel and breast.<sup>18</sup> The World Cancer Research Fund’s Continuous Update Project panel of experts concluded that consuming alcohol is “probably a cause of premenopausal breast cancer” and “a convincing cause of postmenopausal breast cancer”.<sup>19</sup>

Despite this, public awareness of the link between alcohol consumption and cancer is low: a 2016 study published in the BMJ found that, unprompted, only 13% of respondents identified cancer as a potential health outcome of alcohol consumption.<sup>20</sup>

- Any strategy to reduce women’s (particularly breast) cancer cases must seek to reduce overall alcohol consumption through population-level policies (such as placing restrictions on alcohol marketing) that reduce overall consumption of alcohol.
- Government must work to increase public awareness of the link between alcohol consumption and increased cancer risk.
- Government should conduct a thorough review of alcohol labelling. Labels should be mandated to include include a cancer-specific health warning.

*“It’s a deadly killer, and yet it’s readily available in pretty bottles luring is all in with a warning so small you need a magnifying glass to read it. And then before you know it you’re addicted. The stereotype of alcohol is casts a dark sky over those that still manage to function it deters them from getting help, until it’s too late. That was my beautiful 46 year old sister who left me, her husband and 2 kids last year. This problem is real” – Mandy, Midlands*

#### 4. Alcohol and liver health

Clinical research evidence demonstrates that *“women are more susceptible than men to the toxic effects of alcohol on the liver for any given dose of alcohol”*.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, women with alcohol use disorders are at greater risk than men of developing liver cirrhosis and hepatitis.<sup>22,23</sup>

*“In 2017, 3255 women had liver disease in England and Wales compared with 2377 in 20016—an increase of more than one third, and the highest total on record”*.<sup>24</sup> In the same year, liver disease and liver cancer caused more years of working life lost for women than did ischemic heart disease and, as a cause of lost working years, was exceeded only by breast cancer.<sup>25</sup>

According to the British Liver Trust, this is because *“women are generally smaller than men and have a greater proportion of fat tissue in their body mass. This means they have less water in their bodies, which results in higher levels of alcohol in the blood (blood alcohol concentration, or ‘BAC’) for every unit of alcohol they consume.”*<sup>26</sup>

- Liver disease is a significant driver of alcohol-related mortality and must be addressed through population-level policies (such as Minimum Unity Pricing) that reduce overall consumption of alcohol while particularly targeting those drinking at increasing- or higher-risk levels.

#### 5. Alcohol and heart health

Drinking alcohol above the Chief Medical Officers’ low-risk guideline amount of 14 units per week increases the risk of high blood pressure, a leading cause of heart attacks and strokes.<sup>27, 28</sup> High blood pressure also increases the risk of developing vascular dementia.<sup>29</sup>

Alcohol is also linked to obesity, overweight and diabetes which, themselves, increase the risk of stroke, heart attack, liver disease and atrial fibrillation.<sup>30</sup> Many alcoholic drinks are highly calorific and high in sugar, yet manufacturers are not required to list ingredients or nutritional values on packaging.

- Government should conduct a thorough review of alcohol labelling. Labels should be mandated to include ingredients and nutritional information, in line with all other food and drink products.

#### 6. Alcohol and sexual health

A 2011 report of the Royal College of Physicians Alcohol and Sexual Health Working Party summarized the evidence of the links between alcohol use and poor sexual health outcomes.<sup>31</sup> Young people are at particular risk: early regular consumption is associated with early onset sexual activity and young people are less likely to use condoms the first time they have sex if they are drunk.<sup>32</sup>

People who reported frequent binge drinking to a 2016 study were more likely also to report unprotected first sex with at least one new partner, emergency contraception use and sexually transmitted infection diagnosis/es in the last five years.<sup>33</sup> A 2019 evidence review found alcohol use to be strongly associated with both the incidence and the course of HIV/Aids, with a causal effect between alcohol use and sex without a condom.<sup>34</sup> Having HIV can also affect the risks associated with drinking alcohol by influencing blood alcohol levels for given levels of consumption.<sup>35</sup>

## 7. Alcohol and fertility, pregnancy, miscarriage and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

Alcohol consumption is associated with irregular periods and altered hormone levels, which has been associated with poor reproductive health.<sup>36</sup> The impact of alcohol on female fertility is uncertain; evidence is inconsistent.<sup>37</sup> There is, however, more consistent evidence that alcohol has a detrimental effect on the success of assisted reproductive technologies.<sup>38,39</sup>

Research from 2017 estimated that the UK has one of the highest rates of drinking during pregnancy in the world at around 41%, putting the UK in the top five globally.<sup>40</sup> Even low levels of drinking during the first trimester of pregnancy increases risk of spontaneous abortion.<sup>41</sup> According to the NHS website, *“Drinking alcohol, especially in the first 3 months of pregnancy, increases the risk of miscarriage, premature birth and your baby having a low birthweight.”*<sup>42</sup>

*“Our adopted daughter suffers from Foetal Alcohol Syndrome which in turn adversely affects and impacts on her whole life. No child should have to suffer this entirely preventable and serious condition!”* – Chris, Sunderland

Families and individuals can also be affected by the life-long impacts associated with the cluster of harms described as Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) of which Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is the most serious form. FASD is caused by drinking alcohol during pregnancy. FAS can cause a wide range of symptoms including: learning and behavioural difficulties; poor growth; problems with movement, balance, attention, concentration, hearing, vision; and problems with the liver, kidneys and heart.<sup>43</sup> FASD may go undiagnosed, particularly if symptoms are less severe, but research estimates that the UK has an FAS rate of 61.3 cases per 10,000 births.<sup>44</sup>

- Government should conduct a thorough review of alcohol labelling. Labels should be mandated to include the Chief Medical Officers’ guidance that it is safest not to drink while pregnant or trying to conceive, and the format of this warning should be mandated according to evidence of effectiveness.<sup>45</sup>
- Alcohol-free and low-alcohol descriptors should be made statutory instead of voluntary, and adherence regulated, to prevent manufacturers wrongly labelling 0.5% ABV products as alcohol-free.

## 8. Alcohol, dementia and alcohol-related brain damage

Emerging (pre-print) evidence suggests that any alcohol consumption affects the brain, and that moderate consumption has more widespread adverse effects than previously detected.<sup>46</sup> Drinking above the low-risk guidelines of 14 units per week in later life is associated with the onset of dementia.<sup>47</sup> Older women are a group of concern: around 20% of women aged 65-74 consume more than the daily recommended limit.<sup>48</sup> Alcohol dependence is a significant risk factor: a 2018 study found that *“alcohol use disorders were a major risk factor for onset of all types of dementia, and especially early-onset dementia”*.<sup>49</sup>

Sustained alcohol consumption can cause alcohol-related brain damage (ARBD), including ‘alcohol-related dementia’. ARBD is caused by damage to nerve cells, blood vessels, low levels of vitamin B1 (thiamine) and head injuries. Unlike dementia, ARBD may not get worse over time, if the patient receives support and stops drinking. Women with ARBD tend to be diagnosed younger than men and after fewer years of heavy drinking. ARBD is believed to be under-diagnosed and under-recognised by health professionals. Alcohol Change UK commissioned a 2019 rapid evidence review of ARBD which identified a need for greater clinical research on this topic and enhanced professional knowledge.<sup>50</sup>

## 9. Alcohol and mental health

*“Alcohol harms women's mental health and over time is a contributory factor for; increased anxiety, depression, panic attacks, self-loathing, low self-esteem and fear. Alcohol prevents a woman from becoming her true authentic self.”* – Tiff, Cornwall

Women are more likely than men to drink for ‘negative reinforcement’; that is, to combat stress, anxiety or ‘negative affect’, including depression.<sup>51</sup> Alcohol consumption also has a negative impact on mental health. A 2019 Rapid Evidence Review commissioned by Alcohol Change UK highlighted a strong multi-directional link between alcohol use disorders and mental health disorders including depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, personality disorder and schizophrenia. Furthermore, the review identified that a national policy framework for working with people with co-morbid mental health and substance use disorders is well overdue.<sup>52</sup>

86% of people in alcohol treatment services have a co-occurring mental health condition. However, experiencing both a mental health condition and an alcohol use disorder makes it much harder to access treatment for either. A survey of mental health and alcohol service professionals identified lack of understanding and joined up working between services, funding and workforce shortages, and stigma facing those with two or more diseases or conditions as barriers to accessing services.<sup>53</sup>

- We support the joint submission by Agenda and Mind and, in particular, its call for the Women's Health Strategy to aim for parity of esteem between physical and mental health.

## 10. Alcohol and violence against women and girls

Research evidence shows clear links between alcohol and violence against women and girls, especially domestic abuse. Although alcohol is not a direct cause, and is never an excuse, it can be an aggravating factor. A 2019 rapid evidence review of the role of alcohol in contributing to violence in intimate relationships, commissioned by Alcohol Change UK, found that there is overall a statistically significant association between alcohol use and intimate partner violence perpetration and victimisation.<sup>54</sup> Alcohol can increase the risk of abuse taking place, increase the severity of that abuse, and increase the risk of experiencing domestic abuse.<sup>55</sup>

20-50% of cases of domestic abuse take place when the perpetrator has been drinking<sup>56</sup> and the risk of rape is twice as high in attacks involving offenders who have been drinking.<sup>57</sup> A review of domestic homicides by the Home Office in 2016 found that substance use was a factor in more than half of intimate partner homicides.<sup>58</sup>

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen calls to domestic abuse helplines skyrocket. At the same time, previously heavy drinkers have been drinking more during the past year.

As well as increasing the risk of violence against women and girls when a perpetrator has been drinking, victims/survivors can turn to alcohol to cope with the trauma they have experienced. One in 20 women in England have experienced extensive physical and sexual violence. Almost one-third of these women have an alcohol problem, more than double that of women who have not had these experiences.<sup>59</sup>

Violence is not only experienced between people in intimate relationships. Evidence shows that parents experience abuse from their children who are drinking<sup>60</sup> and that other family members can suffer as well. 32% of family members were victims of violence when their loved one had an active addiction, but only 11% when the loved one was in recovery.<sup>61</sup>

## 11. Alcohol treatment and services

*“My mum just died in her 70's of alcohol related liver failure, it was a slow, sad and painful way to go. She only drank heavily in later life and as her health deteriorated she simply did not make the connection. Her diagnosis took years. Information from the doctors and hospital was very vague, some doctors appeared unaware of how advanced her condition was and the haematologist flatly refused to have a discussion about it with me even though my mum gave permission.” – Rhea, Somerset*

Alcohol treatment services are desperately needed. Just one in five people who need treatment for alcohol dependency receive it.<sup>62</sup> Alcohol treatment services are underfunded. As public health spending has been cut, alcohol treatment services have been disproportionately affected. Between 2016-17 and 2017-18, alongside a 3.5% cut to public health spend, expenditure on alcohol treatment services was cut by 8%.<sup>63</sup>

Between 2016 and 2018 more than two-thirds of local authorities in England cut their alcohol treatment budgets, with 17 of them imposing cuts of more than 50%.<sup>64</sup>

More deprived areas have experienced the deepest cuts; the ten most deprived local authorities cut spend by 32% between 2014-15 and 2019-20, compared to just 8% in the least deprived.<sup>65</sup>

Cuts to alcohol treatment are a false economy. Cost savings made by spending less on alcohol treatment are simply displaced onto the NHS. While the rate of people starting specialist alcohol treatment decreased by 5% each year, as an average across all local authorities in England, the rate of alcohol-related hospital admissions increased by 3% each year.<sup>66</sup>

We welcome government's commitment in the NHS Long Term Plan to ensure ACTs are established in the most severely affected hospitals. However, this should be further rolled out so that all district hospitals can provide an



adequate level of cover. This means at least four expert nurses, in order to provide a 24/7 service. NICE calculate that a seven-day alcohol specialist nurse service is estimated to save £179,000 per annum per 100,000 population.<sup>67</sup>

Women-specific services are essential and need to be tailored to individual circumstances, such as providing anonymous online support,<sup>68</sup> and linked in to domestic abuse organisations. But women-only alcohol treatment services are sparse in England and Wales; available in less than half of English local authorities, and only one in five Welsh unitary authorities.<sup>69</sup> A 2018 report by Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP) and the Institute of Alcohol Studies (IAS) recommends increasing availability of and access to “*residential treatment and recovery support for women with children*” and anonymous support services for women, such as online portals.<sup>70</sup> More access to gender- and trauma-informed services is needed, like Trevi House in Plymouth<sup>71</sup>, where women can access rehabilitation services without being separated from their children.

## 12. Alcohol harm reduction policies

We welcome the Government’s commitments relating to alcohol in the Prevention Green Paper, but these commitments do not go far enough to address the significant harm caused by alcohol.

We also welcome the government’s commitment to a cross-government Addictions Strategy and will look forward to responding to the forthcoming consultation. However, in order to make a significant impact on alcohol harm, focusing only on those people who are dependent on alcohol is insufficient.

In order to reduce the alcohol-related health harms outlined in this submission, alcohol consumption must be reduced across the population. The World Health Organization’s comprehensive review of global evidence, supported by Public Health England, shows that the most cost-effective strategies for reducing alcohol harm are increasing prices (for example by raising alcohol duties or setting a price floor), limiting marketing and controlling availability.<sup>72,73</sup>

We recommend the Women’s Health Strategy for England endorses and calls for a range of cross-Government policies to reduce alcohol harm for women, including:

- Funding for Alcohol Care Teams in all hospitals.
- Promotion of behaviour change campaigns like Dry January, an evidence-based, supportive, experiential behaviour change campaign proven to reduce alcohol consumption over the medium to long term.<sup>74</sup>
- Raising the price of alcohol by linking alcohol duty to strength and inflation, and ensuring alcohol duty receipts cover the costs to the taxpayer caused by alcohol harm.
- Level up with Scotland and Wales by introducing a minimum unit price for alcohol.
- Restricting alcohol marketing and advertising.
- Introducing a new regulatory system to ensure effective alcohol labelling.
- Introducing a public health licensing objective to give Local Authorities more power to limit availability.

Finally, owing to the diverse nature of alcohol’s harms (including and beyond health harms), the best way to address this is through a well-resourced, cross-government national alcohol strategy.

*“My mother was an alcoholic. When I was 11 her behaviour had become so erratic and distressing that I no longer wished to be with her. She received several invasive, pointless and expensive health interventions, her problems being blamed on ‘women’s troubles’. physical and mental health were close to rock bottom.*

*“My father and our GP managed to get her a place in an alcoholic recovery unit, after 3 months in the Unit she had sobered up, faced her demons and remain sober for 18 years until her death. Crucially, she went on to live a fulfilled and happy life. She support hundreds of other alcoholics to find sobriety, held down a well-paid job, and I enjoyed a wonderful relationship with her.*

*“Tackling Alcoholism positively, with proper resourcing and a long term plan leads to far better outcomes for alcoholics, their families and close friends, but is also reduces costs for the NHS and social care in the long term and enables women to become familial, social and economic contributors to society.” – Dee, Wiltshire*

## Appendix: Additional messages from our supporters

<p>I think this should be a priority as alcohol does effect women's health and also the health of un born babies as it leads to learning difficulties in their future life as a loved one has shown clear example of this as she drank during pregnancy and now the child has struggles in life. I am in full support of this.</p>	<p>Anna, Birmingham</p>
<p>I have seen first hand the damage that can be caused by the use of alcohol. It can often hide other underlying health conditions and it can be too late to help when issues are found. My mother died when I was 28, due to alcohol harm. She was only 46 and I felt that there was never enough support around to tackle this issue. Alcohol harm causes long term damaged, but creates even more when that person is no longer here due to no support.</p>	<p>Samantha, Brighton</p>
<p>My father was an alcoholic, and because he was rarely ever sober he ruined the lives of two women, and made the early lives of his daughters' very difficult. My youngest daughter began to drink heavily when she was only fifteen. Her two children had horrible childhoods because of her drinking, which made it impossible for her to maintain a relationship, or to work, or to properly care for her children.</p>	<p>Sue, East Anglia</p>
<p>The crisis that is alcohol harm has been greatly exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. Not only have some of those who are already at risk found the social isolation unbearable; they have increased alcohol consumption to help them cope with it. Also of concern is the number of people who have found themselves, for the first time, drinking more alcohol as a direct consequence of feeling isolated socially. Both groups are in need of targeted support and advice</p>	<p>Elizabeth, East of England</p>
<p>Alcohol has significant effects on women's health. It increases the risk of breast cancer, affects fertility, and can cause pregnancy loss and harm to an unborn foetus. Research evidence suggests that women may face greater risks than men, even at lower consumption levels.</p>	<p>Shalini, Essex</p>
<p>It causes so much heartache and costs the NHS so much money dealing with the effects on the body. It is far too easy to get hold off and too cheap. Look at how cigarettes are now known to cause so much harm. The anger and aggression that can follow drunken behaviour also is a problem.</p>	<p>Clare, Greater London</p>
<p>Because it is has become a normalised way of coping with parenting. When the truth is, it ruins mental and physical health, destroys relationships and makes life generally harder. We need to stop drinks companies targeting women and grooming them.</p>	<p>Emma, Hampshire</p>
<p>Women are encouraged to use alcohol as a stress reliever instead of getting the help they need. Insidious advertising is targeted at them. Women need positive advice not crutches that damage their mental and physical health and impair their judgment.</p>	<p>Donna, Kent</p>
<p>We are influenced and condition via TV, film and advertising to believe alcohol is a much needed part of an adults life. For relaxing, socialising, calming benefits. None of these things are true benefits of drinking alcohol and the sooner we all realise the harm it does is far more significant then any short lived, placebo benefits. We as a nation need to address why we feel we need to drink, remove the glamour from it and make it normal not to need a drink so we can raise our children to fully understand alcohol and the harm it can do and the danger they could find theirselves. For example I don't think we would ever normalise offering a child drugs with their Sunday dinner!</p>	<p>Leah, Kent</p>
<p>Because the pressures of life in 2021 are enormous for women coping with families, children, elderly parents, finances and work. They often turn to alcohol as an answer to their tiredness which can, in turn, lead to alcoholism.</p>	<p>Irene, Lancashire</p>
<p>Alcohol destroys physical health, mental health, relationships, careers, wealth and long term outlooks. The cost to society in terms of the burden on the NHS, the burden of loved ones, the impact upon employers &amp; productivity etc is huge. More needs to be done to educate the public and help those impacted.</p>	<p>Jayne, Leicestershire</p>

<p>I believe that women are being specifically targeted particularly by companies selling wine, through merchandise from socks with "Bring me... ..More Wine, to large wine glasses holding several units of alcohol with similar messages engraved on them.</p> <p>I believe, as wine glasses increase in size, the no. of units of alcohol should be engraved up the sides of the glasses. I also believe that supermarkets should legally be forced to have separate checkouts for alcohol which I believe would reduce the likelihood of mindlessly popping a bottle of wine, or any other alcohol, into shopping trolleys, as few people would be willing to queue twice unless they were specifically buying the wine for a specific occasion.</p>	Shona, Lincolnshire
<p>My parents had many drunken rows when I was a child, causing both of them to struggle with mental health for years, and this affected me as a child and as an adult.</p>	Bobby, London
<p>Like many women, I grew up with an alcoholic parent – in my case, my father. He wasn't violent, but preferred beer to his children. My mother grew up with an alcoholic father and married a man who felt familiar. Stress made her violent. Children damaged by alcoholism grow into damaged adults. I see it right across my family.</p>	Catherine, London
<p>Alcohol harm is very bad</p>	Sam, London
<p>I have first-hand experience of the harm alcohol does to families.</p>	Tracy, London
<p>I worked with people in alcohol addiction, I think there needs to be more put out there on how addictive and damaging alcohol is.</p>	Sue, Merseyside
<p>I used to drink too much, and it was dangerous, because it interfered with my work as a doctor. I misused alcohol as a stress reliever.</p>	Barbara, Midlands
<p>Alcohol is the most dangerous but most socially ' acceptable' drug. The addiction process is so slow you have no idea you are dependant until you can't stop drinking every day! For women the dangers of drinking too much are massive and need addressing. A re-education on the harm of alcohol is now as important as the messages around smoking!</p>	Laurie, Midlands
<p>Alcohol, like other drugs, negatively impacts women by increasing domestic violence and reducing money available for family support. This includes emotional harm to children and inadequate parenting.</p> <p>In addition the demands on the NHS are increased and the, often female nurses in hospitals, are frequently subject to abuse, both verbal and physical. Similarly shop workers and the police are also adversely affected.</p>	Lesley-Jane, Midlands
<p>I personally have been affected by alcohol throughout my life. My father was an alcoholic, he was abusive towards myself and my siblings. As an adult I have had issues with alcohol and drug misuse, I feel as though alcohol should be regulated much tighter.</p> <p>Alcohol has massive impacts on NHS and policing. In my personal opinion it should be illegal or at least people should need licenses to purchase alcohol, those who are arrested for alcohol related crimes lose their option to buy alcohol.</p> <p>I don't want to see my children suffer in relation to alcohol the way I have</p>	Kirsty, Norfolk
<p>Alcohol is the cause of systemic harm to millions in this country. It can lead to crime, violence, family break up and ruined lives. It is high time that the alcohol industry was reined in. It does no good for anyone.</p>	Shan, Norfolk
<p>I have personal experience of how alcohol can affect mental health and isolates you from living a normal happy life.</p>	Jill, North East
<p>I am a 41 year old woman. I grew up with an extremely violent, alcoholic father. I have always had a very unhealthy/abusive relationship with alcohol, battling this dominates my every day thoughts and life. I now live with my 44 year old partner who has end stage kidney failure and is on dialysis, for which alcohol has almost certainly played at least a large role in. Alcohol has negatively affected my life for as long as I can remember and probably always will. Something needs to be done to educate children about just how physically and emotionally damaging alcohol abuse can be. Especially the longer term aspects.</p>	Joanne, North East
<p>It is highly addictive and such a dangerous substance, affecting mental ability and ruining lives.</p>	Steph, North West
<p>More and more women are drinking more and more alcohol. Now the entire nation is in the grip of this addictive and carcinogenic substance. The government must act now.</p>	Tony, North West



Alcohol harm should be included in the Women's strategy and not a fact of shame. We all have our weaknesses and addictions, whether it's crisps, chocolate, exercise or fizzy pop. Please let's include this and get the support to those who need it!	Sarah, North Yorkshire
<p>If you would like older women to remain healthy during and long after midlife (and menopause) so as not to put a strain on themselves, their families and 'the system' it is imperative to take action now to change the narrative around drinking, ageing and women's health.</p> <p>We need to do a better job of improving the quality of women's live to keep the economy thriving and life quality improved. If women stay fit and healthy, their families, community and country can only benefit.</p> <p>We need to call attention to the media's message that we are a country that lives to drink every single day and that it's good for us to do so. Because the reality is, it is not good physically and mentally. A slippery slope that takes place over time.</p>	Stacy, North Yorkshire
The affects of alcohol cause extreme financial damage, severe distress and unbelievable physical implications. I feel that the dangers posed by alcohol to women in society are not emphasized or educated enough. I have lost family members to both cancer and as a direct result of Alcoholism. I have only learnt the consequences of alcohol harm due to this traumatizing journey.	Roisin, Northamptonshire
Alcohol ruins so many lives. It's not seen as an evil drug but that's exactly what it is. We need to educate our children to prevent further harm.	Suzanne, Northamptonshire
Drinking to excess destroys families I work with women from across the world who are struggling to cut down - they are functioning in life but want to drink less. Women are waking up we are tired of the Mummy needs wine culture. Many who are not in crisis need support and understanding of alcohol-related harm.	Claire, Northumberland
Alcohol has had a damaging impact on several women in my life, including close family members and friends. The current alcohol regulations do not adequately reflect the risk posed by alcohol, and the effects are being felt by families across the UK. Urgent action is needed.	Tom, Reading
<p>My godson's parents were both alcoholics. His mother who is still alive although very ill with bleeds caused by a lifetime of alcohol use and he has already lost his father through substitution addiction of prescription drugs having finally got dry from alcohol. It has blighted his young life (currently 17) and has affected every single facet of his life and personality.</p> <p>He now himself struggles with mental health due to what he has been exposed to and his loss. Also he has his own difficulties now with binge drug and alcohol use. The services just aren't there to support him and weren't there to support his parents. the government relies on a poorly funded 3rd sector as a way of delivery most of its agenda and as a way of escaping responsibility for what is an epidemic in this county.</p>	Robin, Somerset
As a probation officer I knew many people whose lives were blighted by alcohol. Sometimes they were the drinker; sometimes it was someone they loved. Sometimes alcohol was a catalyst for crime, sometimes crime was a catalyst for alcohol abuse. Alcohol causes more problems than it can ever cure.	Alan, South of England
As both the domestic and professional burdens on women increase, the use of alcohol as a crutch is becoming common place. The culture of midweek drinking is common place to the point that it is openly joked about in school playgrounds across the nation. 'Lunch with wine', 'book club with wine', statements such as 'I can't wait to get the kids to bed to crack open a bottle' are common place, and worryingly, have become a socially accepted norm. Routine drinking too easily becomes dependency and the resulting economic, health and social implications can not be underestimated. I learned that the hard way.	Jennifer, South East
Most lethal drug on earth should be banned	Ann, South West
The alcohol industry have been targeting women as a major growth sector and been advertising accordingly. They manufacture its products specifically to the female market. As a result women are discovering the misery of becoming a slave to drink.	Anna, South West
It's simply not widely enough known, the harms that alcohol can do. Too much emphasis is put into needing alcohol to have fun or not be boring!	Louisa, South West

My husband was an alcoholic, inflicting untold miseries upon my two daughters and myself. One of my daughter's was a victim of alcohol abuse, again inflicting her two daughters with neglect and the witnessing of distressing scenes	Rachel, South West
Alcohol is a massive understated problem that affects families, children and workers across the UK. Radical reform is needed to provide high level support to give women the support they need to combat alcohol misuse and addiction.	Adam, South Yorkshire
PLEASE JUST LISTEN PEOPLE ALCOHOL RUINED MY LIFE, I HAVENT HAD ANY FOR 15YEARS BUT THE DAMAGE WAS DONE & NEEDED HELP GETTING OF IT AT A COST OF £ 5000, I LOST MY CHILDREN & A SMASHING WIFE [ 2ND ] SO PLEASE LISTEN	Stewart, South West
I have witnessed in professional capacity the harm alcohol misuse can cause.	Sarah, Surrey
There is a massive marketing strategy aimed at female drinkers. From Mummy Wine time, to Prosecco candles, to pink girly glittery cocktails & gins there is a continual bombardment that alcohol is fun, sexy and the only way to deal with the rigours of life. For women it is seen as an acceptable parenting aid - men aren't encouraged to have a beer at 5pm whilst the kid do their homework are they?? There is minimal information and education about the effects of alcohol on female health - be that fertility, pregnancy, bone health, liver health and cancers. In addition the massive correlation between alcohol and mental health is downplayed and in fact reversed; having wine or gin is seen as the ultimate mood lifter when in fact it does the opposite especially when combined with female hormones. I stopped drinking Feb 1st at the age of 51. I don't intend to spend my 50s onwards half pickled and there should be a much greater focus on removing the link between alcohol and good times and instead a focus on what it actually does to our bodies and female health & wellbeing.	Emma, Warwickshire
Alcohol is so easily to get hold of and the understanding of units is not widely known, more support is needed for women who misunderstand the dangers of alcohol	Heather, Warwickshire
Alcohol issues need dealing with	Gary, West Midlands
I think alcohol should not be discounted and piled high in the supermarket aisles. It should be in the alcohol aisles only. Very often it's piled up on display at the front of the store often on discount especially bank holidays. People attempting sobriety can avoid the alcohol aisles but when it piled up in other places and front of store it's hard. Especially in the early days of giving up.	Margaret, West Midlands
As an alcohol advisor I am seeing many women who are drinking considerably more than the recommended government guidelines for many reasons and it is ruining lives. We need to stop making alcohol so accessible and cheap, it is a poisonous drug that is not only addictive but destroying people's lives and health. It is the last Taboo that we need to tackle to remove the stigma and shame..... 'because talking about your relationship with alcohol should be as easy as buying it'	Sam, West Sussex
Alcohol damages physical and mental health. It ravages through families ruining relationships and reducing the life chances of children.	Mark, York
There is too much alcohol advertising targeted at women with very little promotion about the negative effects of drinking too much. There should be more discussion around the sliding scale of drinking from safe levels to dangerous levels. Many women are drinking at dangerous levels but heavy or binge drinking has become so culturally normalised that they are unaware of the harms they are doing to themselves.	Norma, Yorkshire
I watch a member of my family suffer horribly from her alcohol addiction. I see her children suffer too. The help she's been offered has been inadequate. Perhaps the drink industry could pay a large contribution from their profits to be invested in research into and treatment of the physical and mental harm done by alcohol.	Stephanie, Yorkshire

<p>My Sister in Law has been a chronic alcohol abuser since her teens. Now approaching 50, she is a functioning alcoholic who also regularly binges for days at a time on 'blowouts'. Her alcohol abuse seems to have stemmed from British Binge Drinking culture, but when everyone else slowed down as they got older, she seemed unable to stop and ended up addicted. She has more or less lost her family, destroyed any positive relationships she had and I worry she will end up totally estranged from those who love her. Her family, now at the end of tethers repaired countless times over the years, are at the stage where there is no option but to turn their backs in order to save their own sanity. The British culture and education around alcohol must change, to try and stop people become addicted during the 'acceptable' binge drinking years that British life pats on the back and says 'good lass'.</p>	<p>Anon, Yorkshire</p>
<p>Alcohol has had a detrimental effect on my life without question. A normalised culture of binge drinking at university led to an unhealthy relationship with alcohol. Post-university I self-medicated with it to deal with the stresses of a busy career, which ultimately led to severe anxiety and depression, and needing to take time off work. I am not alone - there are countless women I know with a similar story.</p>	<p>Chris, London</p>
<p>I have had a very unhealthy relationship with alcohol since my mid twenties. Despite alcohol being an addictive poison, it's cheap, available everywhere and seemingly the entire social life of the UK revolves around it. As alcohol can have such a damaging effect on women, I think it is vital for it to be included in the new health strategy. Sadly, a close friend's sister died from liver failure caused by alcoholism just before Christmas. She was my age, only 48.</p>	<p>Deborah, South East</p>
<p>Alcohol can have a lasting impact on the health of women and girls. Not only does alcohol effect their physical health, but it can have an impact on the wider, associated harms to women, such as unplanned pregnancy and increased risk of sexual assault. Alcohol can also have a devastating effect on a fetus which causes harm to babies and children.</p>	<p>Justine, North East</p>
<p>Alcohol harm is something that affects everyone, whether directly or indirectly, and is something that is so regularly overlooked in society. Alcohol is a substance that we are all regularly exposed to and we are all expected to 'be responsible' with our drinking but some people are not able to moderate or control their drinking, through no fault of their own but because alcohol effects our cognitive executive functioning and is a harmful, inhibiting substance. The government needs to become more accountable in educating people on the dangers of alcohol to themselves and to our precious NHS.</p>	<p>Abbie, North West</p>
<p>As a professional working in the substance misuse field, I believe now is the time to tackle the harm that alcohol causes women and men. Far too many people have lost their lives through alcohol. It's really depressing to see people, on a daily basis, who are slowly killing themselves though their excessive use of alcohol.</p> <p>Please prioritise and focus on the harm that alcohol is causing to our society. Unless some immediate action is taken, more people will die and we will be asking why.....</p>	<p>Anon, East Midlands</p>
<p>My aunt and mother-in-law both died as a direct result of alcohol. One in an accident following years of alcohol abuse to mask mental health problems and the other through alcohol-related disease, although she would have been considered a social drinker of her generation, not an alcoholic. Most peers use or have used alcohol due to depression/anxiety etc. There's an epidemic of misuse in women in their 40s/50s, celebrated by society 'Mummy drinks gin', 'wine o'clock' etc. A time bomb for the NHS.</p>	<p>Cate, East of England</p>
<p>As a woman of a certain age I have been researching natural ways of helping me with my menopausal symptoms. Since being alcohol free, my symptoms have totally disappeared! Doctors all appear to agree that giving up alcohol really does benefit women's' health but seem to be in denial about the damage it does to our brains and general health, preferring to support the prescription of synthetic hormones.</p>	<p>Clare, East Midlands</p>
<p>I lost my mother to a death caused by alcoholism and am now watching my sister go down the same path. Alcohol is legally available everywhere yet it is so very dangerous and damaging. It often leaves a trail of destruction in its wake and it also leaves family and friends of alcoholics completely heartbroken.</p>	<p>Petra, Dorset</p>
<p>My daughter is an alcoholic. I dread to think of the long-term harm this has had on her daughter. I also worry about other children of alcoholics who do not have any kind of family support. Please take action to make it easier for women (and men) to access treatment for their alcoholism.</p>	<p>Jessie, South East</p>

I am astonished by the lack of action taken by the Government in relation to the detrimental impact of alcohol on society, families, relationships and individuals. Women in particular are increasingly targeting by alcohol marketing and social media, with 'wine o'clock' and 'Mummy's wine time' increasingly prevalent. Alcohol Abuse Disorder affects the physical health of women, as well as they're ability to fulfill their full potential in society. I myself have drunk heavily since the 90s told me I was sufficiently equal to men to do so. I have struggled for over a decade to change my drinking habits and have yet to succeed. The dearth of funded community support for alcohol is astonishing, and the ongoing expectation that AA is the only route available both outdated and entirely insufficient. I have made use of online social forums and the ever growing number of communities and organisations supporting people towards a life of sobriety. It is high time the government took its responsibility to its people more seriously and took real action to end the misery experienced by hundreds of thousands of people across the country caused by excessive alcohol consumption.

Anon, location not shared

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