

# Our work in Wales 2020/21

ALCOHOL  
CHANGE<sup>UK</sup>

We are Alcohol Change UK.  
We work for a society that is  
free from the serious harm  
caused by alcohol.



# We are Alcohol Change UK.

**We work for a society that is free from the harm caused by alcohol.**

We are not anti-alcohol; we are for alcohol change. We are for a future in which people drink as a conscious choice, not a default; where the issues which lead to alcohol problems – like poverty, mental health issues, homelessness – are addressed; and where those of us who drink too much, and our loved ones, have access to high-quality support whenever we need it, without shame or stigma.

The problem is complex, and so the solutions are not simple. But we are ambitious. Driven by our belief that every person deserves to live a full life free from alcohol harm, we create evidence-driven change by working towards five key impacts: improved knowledge, better policies and regulation, shifted cultural norms, improved drinking behaviours, and more and better support and treatment.

**This report summarises our work in Wales between April 2020 and March 2021.**



# Our work in Wales 2020/21

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## Welcome from the Director

Alcohol touches on many aspects of our lives and culture in Wales. Alcohol Change UK's work to reduce alcohol harm in Wales is equally varied and wide-ranging.

Some people may just be looking for tips on how to cut back when their drinking habits start to stray into excess; that's why we've posted 250 reviews of low-alcohol and alcohol-free drinks on our website, in Welsh and English, to help consumers find alternatives to alcohol. Some people need more support to make a change to their drinking, and that's why we offer campaigns like Dry January and Sober Spring. For some people, alcohol has become much more of a problem and they need more targeted and tailored support. We work at this end of the spectrum of harm too; for example, through our Feeding Recovery project we're seeking to work with drinkers who've become malnourished as a result of heavy alcohol use, to help them rediscover the joy of making and sharing food.

One factor that's been ever-present in all of our work in the past year has been the COVID-19 pandemic. This may have led some people to cut down, as city-centre Saturday-night drinking sessions and post-work drinks with colleagues have been on pause. But with so many of us experiencing stresses we never anticipated, it's not surprising that we've seen an increase in the use of alcohol as a coping mechanism – with the heaviest drinkers most likely to be drinking even

more. We have stepped up to offer more online support, forged links between treatment services to promote shared learning, and rolled out research to better understand the 'new normal'.

Looking ahead, the challenge for us all now is to learn the lessons of the pandemic and its associated lockdowns and other restrictions: to understand how drinking patterns have shifted, to what extent that change is permanent, and how those of us working to reduce alcohol harm must adapt the advice and support we offer. It's already clear that treatment services should maintain some of the new remote ways of working that have enabled them to reach many new people, while also restoring the face-to-face support that many people with alcohol problems depend upon. There is a role for all of us to play as we seek to rebuild and recover.


**Andrew Misell,**  
Director for Wales



### Our areas of impact

Our UK-wide and Wales teams work to create change across five key areas of impact.





The harm caused by alcohol is not inevitable. By working together, we can make change happen faster.

# Alcohol and the COVID-19 pandemic

The past year has been a uniquely difficult one for so many of us in Wales. At Alcohol Change UK we were keen from the outset to understand how the pandemic has affected drinking across the population.

## Understanding the changing nature of drinking

Our UK-wide survey from Opinium, published in December 2020, showed that people have been drinking differently as a result of the pandemic. Close to one in three (29%) people who drink alcohol told us that they drank more in 2020 compared to the previous year, and around one in five (22%) have felt concerned about the amount they have been drinking since COVID-19 restrictions began in March 2020 last year. A quarter (27%) of people who drink alcohol also said they would like to cut down in 2021.

Researchers from OnePoll, working on our behalf, also found a similar picture specifically in Wales, with nearly two-thirds (63%) of respondents saying that their drinking had changed in some way during the pandemic, either drinking more

than before or cutting back. Anxiety and depression were mentioned by many people as reasons for increasing their consumption, while others said they were drinking less in order to protect their health.

## Helping treatment and support services to adapt

It was vital that those of us in Wales struggling with alcohol dependence continued to be supported during periods when the country was in lockdown and access to traditional services was restricted.

## Connecting services

Working with Developing a Caring Wales (DACW), we helped bring together Welsh substance misuse agencies with their colleagues in England who make up the Collective Voice consortium. A key outcome was the robust analysis of the



issues that have arisen for both services and service-users, capturing good practice and invaluable learning that can inform future practice.

## Blogs from the frontline

Our Wales team worked closely with colleagues in England to produce a series of blogs from the frontline, offering opportunities for people working in the field of alcohol harm reduction to share how the pandemic has affected the people they support. The blog series included pieces from Martin Blakebrough, Chief Executive of Newport-based treatment agency Kaleidoscope, on how alcohol services adapted to the crisis, and Dr Lee Hogan, from Bangor University, on how people supported each other in their recovery during the lockdowns.

"We co-ordinated a series of blogs from the frontline, offering opportunities for people working in the field of alcohol harm reduction to describe how the pandemic has affected the people they support."

"Anxiety and depression were mentioned by many people in Wales as reasons for increasing their consumption."

## One in five

have felt concerned about the amount they have been drinking since COVID-19 restrictions began in March last year.



# Alcohol and the COVID-19 pandemic

## Towards a post-pandemic Wales

### Briefing paper on economic impact

In September 2020 we published a briefing paper, 'Casting a long shadow', which summarised the evidence on how economic instability can affect drinking habits. While it is too early to assess the overall effect of the pandemic on the public purse, previous economic slowdowns have been shown to increase alcohol consumption, and therefore harm, amongst some groups. The briefing offered some practical advice on issues that could arise in the coming months and years.

### Working with Senedd Cymru

In March 2021, Alcohol Change UK joined together with Adfam, Barod, CAIS, Kaleidoscope and WCADA to urge candidates standing for Senedd Cymru to commit to building a healthy recovery from the pandemic.

We asked candidates from all parties to:

- Make clear that reducing alcohol harm is a national priority, by renewing and resourcing the Substance Misuse Delivery Plan throughout the next Senedd term from 2021 to 2026.
- Ensure that support is available in all parts of Wales for people with alcohol problems, in ways they can access easily and safely, without shame or stigma.
- Maintain the remote support for the families of drinkers that has developed during the lockdown, and work for a return to face-to-face support outside the home as soon as it is safe to do so.

You can find out more details about our proposals, and the reasons we made them, in our short policy document, 'Building a healthy recovery', available to download from our website.



"We asked candidates from all parties in Wales to make clear that reducing alcohol harm is a national priority."

# Promoting policies that reduce harm



"Alarmingly, the research concluded that 'no confidence' should be placed in existing safeguards on retailer websites and that it is still 'trivially easy for someone underage to buy alcohol online'."

## Minimum unit pricing

Alcohol Change UK has lobbied hard over the past decade for the introduction of minimum unit pricing (MUP) in Wales, a means of setting a baseline price, based on strength, below which no one can sell an alcoholic drink. We were delighted that this became law in Wales in March 2020, a targeted measure that will reduce the heaviest drinking and related harms. We have also worked hard to raise public awareness of MUP, more details of which can be found in our 2019-20 annual report.

In September 2020, we published the results of a survey indicating that 1 in 10 drinkers in Wales are already drinking less as a consequence of MUP. Researchers from OnePoll, working on our behalf, surveyed 1,000 adults in Wales who normally drink alcohol. Of those who were aware of MUP, 10% said they were drinking less alcohol because of it.

## Online alcohol sales

Consumers in Wales increasingly buy alcohol online, a trend that has accelerated during the pandemic as access to physical retail stores became

more challenging. Back in 2013, when online alcohol sales were still in their infancy, we published the report 'On your doorstep', examining the ease with which under 18s were able to bypass online age verification checks.

In June 2020, Wrexham Glyndŵr University published the results of research commissioned by Alcohol Change UK, examining the current state of play. Alarmingly, the research concluded that "no confidence" should be placed in existing safeguards on retailer websites and that it is still "trivially easy for someone underage to buy alcohol online." Over the next year we will be digging deeper into this topic to explore how online retailers can toughen up their policies and processes to restrict minors accessing alcohol in this way.

## 1 in 10

drinkers in Wales are already drinking less as a consequence of MUP (September 2020).



# Understanding and supporting vulnerable drinkers

## Feeding recovery

Around 28,000 people in Wales are thought to be alcohol-dependent, a condition whereby heavy drinking results in ill health and a progressive neglect of alternative interests or activities. Eating is often one of the activities to be displaced by alcohol in a dependent drinker's life, and the combination of alcohol and absence of food is often a key reason for many drinkers' health problems.

We were therefore delighted to have been awarded funding from Sodexo Stop Hunger Foundation to undertake a small pilot project, working with Barod's service users in Swansea to support them to shop for and prepare foods to boost their own physical and mental health. The work will take place in the coming year and will hopefully act as a launchpad for a larger project that will enable people currently trapped in a cycle of excessive drinking and self-neglect to rediscover the joy of making and sharing food with others – building a community of care in which they support each other in their recovery journeys.

“Healthy eating is often one of the activities displaced by alcohol in a dependent drinker's life.”

An estimated  
**28,000**  
people in Wales are  
alcohol dependent

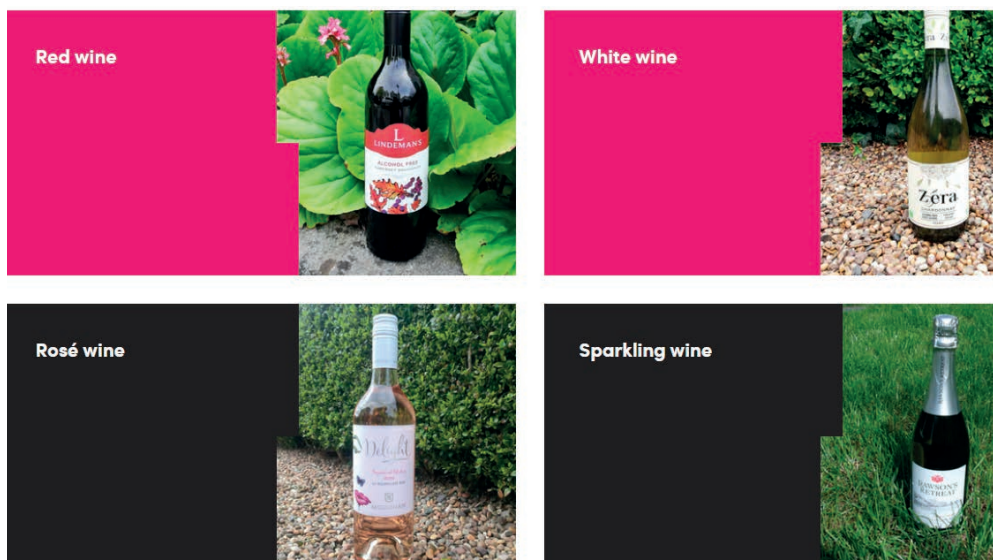
## Alcohol harms amongst Roma, Gypsies and Travellers

In January 2021, we were pleased to announce that we will be funding a peer research project, 'Telling our own stories', led by Professor Louise Condon at Swansea University, into alcohol use and harm among Roma, Gypsies and Travellers. Despite being some of the largest and longest-established minority ethnic groups in Wales and the UK, people from these communities often experience discrimination and poor health outcomes. Their alcohol use patterns and support needs are not well understood.

The project is one of four funded by Alcohol Change UK under the 'New Horizons' grant programme, focused on developing a greater understanding of 'Groups, communities and alcohol harm'.



# Raising awareness of alcohol-free alternatives



Some of our 250+ online alcohol-free and low alcohol drinks reviews.

"The Alcohol Change UK website was visited more than a quarter of a million times last year, making it one of the largest NoLo information sites, as well as the only one available in Welsh."

The alcohol-free and low alcohol (NoLo) drinks market is growing fast, both in volume and variety of products on the market. Supermarkets in Wales and elsewhere now have dedicated shelves, and pubs and bars offer a greater selection.

## Research into the 'NoLo' market

In 2020, Alcohol Change UK commissioned the Social Market Foundation to conduct research into NoLo drinks and the part they could play in tackling alcohol harm. The report found that nearly half of adults in the UK have now tried NoLo drinks. For some people, consuming these drinks has had no impact on their alcohol consumption. But others have reported that the drinks have helped them to either reduce their alcohol intake or stop drinking altogether.

On its own, the growth of sales of NoLo drinks is not enough to solve the problem of alcohol harm, but it does appear to have potential to make a positive impact. More research is needed to identify the nature of the impacts of such drinks on different groups of people, such as heavy drinkers, young people, and people in recovery.

## Alcohol-free reviews

NoLo products can certainly be very helpful for some individuals and, for this reason, we have continued to publish consumer reviews of new products on the Alcohol Change UK website. In fact, the website now hosts more than 250 reviews in total, with over 265,000 unique visits between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, making it one of the largest and most popular NoLo information sites, as well as the only one available in Welsh.

**Nearly half**  
of adults in the UK have  
now tried NoLo drinks.



# Changing drinking behaviour for January and beyond

Dry January is the annual campaign which sees millions of people across the UK go alcohol-free for one month. It's about so much more than January.

Independent research by the University of Sussex has shown that 70% of people who do Dry January with Alcohol Change UK's support – whether via our free Try Dry app or daily emails – are still drinking more healthily six months later. It's an innovative, digital, long-term behaviour change programme and it works.

## A record-breaking year

The number of people signing up for our annual Dry January campaign has grown each year since 2017. In 2020-21, the pandemic presented a new challenge – yet a record 6.5 million people across the UK took part, with people in Wales signing up to use our Try Dry app in record numbers. This premium-quality but free app is a tool to support people throughout their dry month and beyond,

both tracking their drinks and allowing them to set their own goals year-round.

Participants clearly saw Dry January as an opportunity to get something positive back into their lives, such as the energy and fitness that many people lost during the lockdowns, or their old sense of themselves that may have been dulled by increased habitual drinking. Of those who took part in Dry January 2021 with Alcohol Change UK's support, 97% told us they plan to drink less or stay dry going forward.

We also now offer further opportunities for people to change their drinking during the year. In addition to offering the year-round use of the app for free, we offer the structured Sober Spring campaign, a three-month alcohol sabbatical.

"My appetite was poor, my anxiety was through the roof and my blood sugars were high. I decided to do Dry January... The benefits have changed my life. It's like a light bulb has finally been switched on!"



Goodbye 2020,  
hello 2021!

GET YOUR **YOU** BACK.

**DRY JANUARY®**

We're here to help. Download the free Try Dry app to double your chance of a totally alcohol-free month.

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

Alcohol Change UK is the trading name of Alcohol Research UK. Registered office: 27 Bank Street, London, WC2A 4DF. Company number: 1040201. Company limited by guarantee in England and Wales number 1040201.

Dry January is brought to you by **ALCOHOL CHANGE**



Eich cyfle i ailosod y cloc.

CEWCH EICH **bywyd** YN ÔL.

**DRY JANUARY®**

Cewch eich BYWYD yn ôl. Bachwch yr Try Dry app am ddim er mwyn dyblu'r siawns i chi gwblhau'r mis yn ddi-alcohol.

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

Mae Dry January yn un o ymgyrchoedd **ALCOHOL CHANGE**

Free printable resources were made available to unitary authorities, GP surgeries, pharmacies and more.

# Annual conference: alcohol and the whole person

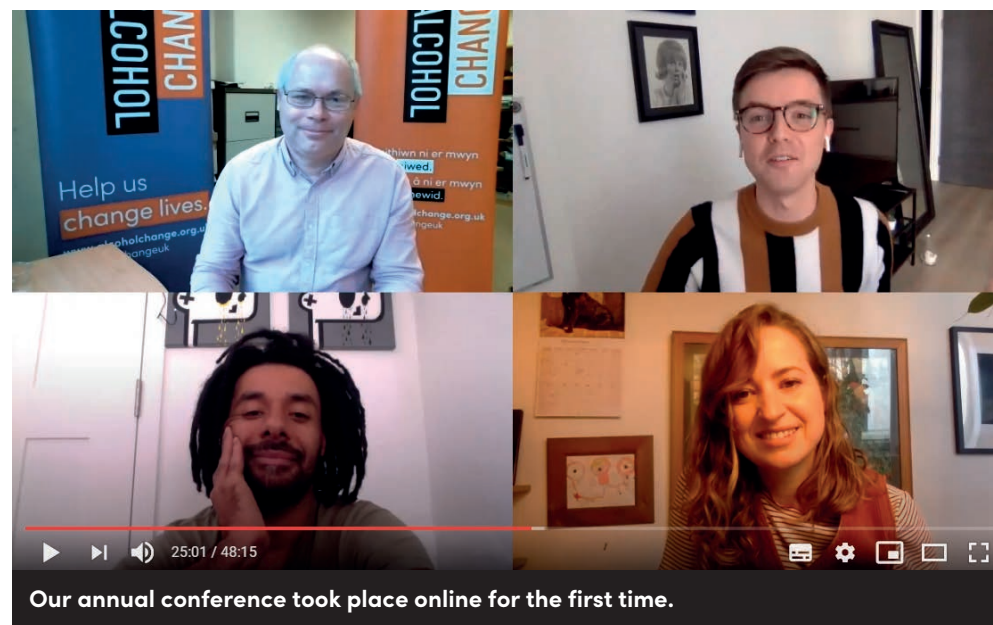
Heavy drinking is often just one symptom of the complex challenges someone faces in their life.

Drinking may be a means to cope with underlying trauma or ongoing mental distress. It may bring its own problems with it, such as low mood and impaired cognition.

Such complex needs do not lend themselves to simple solutions. That is why, for our 2020 annual conference, we brought together a multidisciplinary slate of academics, practitioners, and people with lived experience, to help us all work towards interventions that support the whole person.

The conference, 'Working with the whole person: Alcohol, mental health and complex needs', was originally planned to be held in Bridgend; however, due to COVID-19 restrictions, it became our first-ever online national conference.

Held over two half-days in December 2020, over 300 delegates heard from a range of speakers sharing their expertise and experience. This included a keynote speech from Josh Conolly, telling his powerful story of vulnerability and resilience as the child of a dependent drinker, and a structured conversation between Chelsey Flood, Scott Pearson and Marcus Barnes talking about drinking, not drinking, and how alcohol can come to define our identity.



"Every presentation was valuable and I learned so much. The event reminded me of why I do this job and work tirelessly to support our alcohol clients who are so badly stigmatised."

**Conference delegate**



# Getting our message heard

## Media

One of the ways in which we keep alcohol issues in people's minds in Wales is by generating news stories about our work and responding to alcohol-related stories as they arise. During the past year, we have spoken on national radio and commented in the written press once every 10 days on average and on a wide variety of topics including the impact of alcohol marketing, drinking in the workplace, the relationship between alcohol and mental health and, of course, alcohol consumption during the pandemic.

## E-newsletter

We also publish a quarterly e-newsletter summing up the current issues surrounding alcohol and alcohol harm in Wales, sent to an engaged supporter base of over 300 people.

## Social media

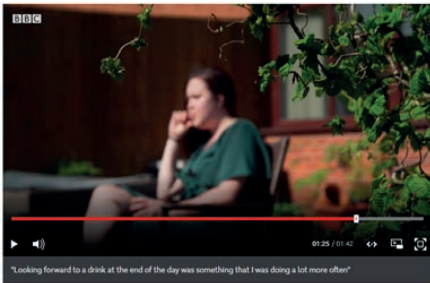
We communicate with the Welsh public via social media, in particular our bilingual Twitter account, @ACCymru, which now has more than 2,400 followers.

# Coronavirus: Alcohol fears amid lockdown boredom

By Emma Lewis  
BBC News

© 18 April 2020

Coronavirus pandemic



01:25 / 01:42

"Looking forward to a drink at the end of the day was something that I was doing a lot more often"

People could develop long-term heavy drinking habits as a result of self-isolating at home, a charity fears.

Over a quarter of adults in Wales who drink have increased their consumption since the coronavirus restrictions were brought in, according to research by Alcohol Change UK.

[illegible]

**Alcohol Change UK Cymru** @ACCymru · 28 Feb

If you're finding that the stresses of lockdown and constant news updates have led to you drinking more than you'd like, you can access support. Anyone can have a problem with alcohol, and everyone deserves support. Find out more about remote help:



Get help now | Alcohol Change UK

If you're worried that you're drinking too much, there's support available. Find out about your options.

🔗 [alcoholchange.org.uk](https://alcoholchange.org.uk)

 **Alcohol Change UK Cymru** @ACCymru - 26 Dec 2020

Goodbye 2020, hello 2021 🍷 For your body and your mind it's time for a total reset. Get your **YOU** back. Try Dry for 31 days 🚫🍷 Sign up now: [alcoholchange.org.uk/get-involved/c...](https://alcoholchange.org.uk/get-involved/c...) #leanwasych



Goodbye 2020,  
hello 2021!

GET YOUR YOU BACK.

 **DRY JANUARY™**

Download the free Try Dry app. [dryjanuary.org.uk](https://dryjanuary.org.uk)

**Alcohol Change UK Cymru** @ACCymru - 28 Feb

Os yw straen arn ym ty a gwirandor newyddion yn peri i chi yfed mwy, mae cymorth ar gael o hyd. Gall unrhyw ym fynd i helyntion ag alcohol, ac mae pawb yn haeddu cefnogaeth. Dysgwch fwy am sut i gael cymorth ble bynnag rydych chi:



**Cael cymorth nawr | Alcohol Change UK**

Os ydych chi'n meddwl eich bod chi'n yfed gormod, mae cymorth ar gael. Dyma rai o'r posibiladau sydd ar agor i chi.

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

### Communicating with our followers on Twitter.

"We have spoken on national radio and commented in the written press on numerous occasions, and on a wide variety of alcohol-related topics."

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