

Our work in Wales 2019-20

ALCOHOL
CHANGE^{UK}

Alcohol harm is a complex issue, but it is not inevitable. By working together, we can make change happen.

A PUB WITH
NO BOOZE

About us

We are Alcohol Change UK.

Our vision is a world free from serious alcohol harm. We work to significantly reduce serious alcohol harm across the UK. Alcohol harm is a major and complex issue, but it is not inevitable. Change is possible, and urgently needed.

Every week in Wales, alcohol results in around 1 in 20 of all deaths. Alcohol harm – mental health problems, liver disease, seven forms of cancer, economic difficulties, and so much more – can affect any one of us, from any walk of life.

The harm doesn't end with the individual; each of us who drinks too much is part of a family and a community who may also feel the effects of our drinking.

Our role in Wales includes:

- Building the evidence base to ensure alcohol policy and practice are more focussed and effective
- Being a trusted partner, bringing together alcohol treatment services, healthcare professionals, researchers, community workers, policy-makers and others to reduce alcohol harm
- Giving people credible, evidence-based information and advice on drinking, in Welsh and English, to help them make informed choices
- Running innovative projects to reduce alcohol harm in Wales.

Alcohol harm in numbers

1 in 20

Every week in Wales, alcohol results in around 1 in 20 deaths¹

14,600

In 2017/18, there were around 14,600 alcohol-specific hospital admissions in Wales³

2%

of adults in Wales consume on average more than

50

units a week, and a further...

16%

drink on average more than

14

units a week²

87%

of people in Wales who received treatment for substance misuse reported a reduction in their substance use⁴

50%

More than 50% of all violent crimes in England and Wales were incidents where victims believed that the offender was under the influence of alcohol⁵

1. Office for National Statistics (2018). Alcohol-specific deaths in the UK: registered in 2018.

2. Statistics for Wales (23 October 2019). National Survey for Wales 2016-17 to 2018-19: Alcohol consumption prior to introduction of minimum price.

3. Public Health Wales Observatory (2019). Alcohol in Wales (2019).

4. Welsh Government (October 2019). Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2019-2022.

5. Op. Cit. Public Health Wales Observatory (2019).

Our year in numbers

100,000

Around 100,000 adults across Wales having a Dry January

150

Over 150 alcohol-free beers, wines, ciders and spirits reviewed

ONCE EVERY WEEK

Mentioned in the Wales and UK media more than once every week

2.4k

@ACCymru

17.8k

@AlcoholChangeUK

Twitter account followers

More than 2 million

Page views on our Alcohol Change UK website

Research into policy

Minimum unit pricing

For the best part of 10 years, we have been advocating for the introduction a minimum unit price for alcohol in Wales. Minimum unit pricing (MUP) is a way of setting a baseline price below which a unit of alcohol cannot be sold.

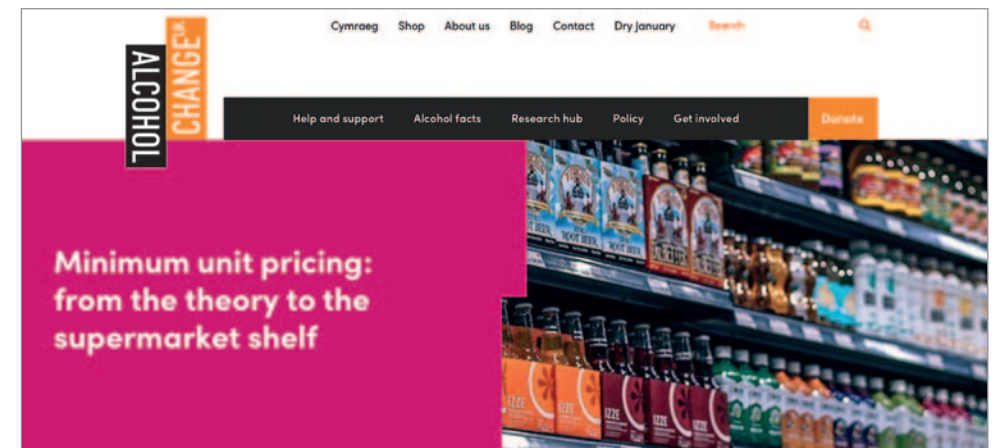
Robust evidence demonstrates that there is a link between the availability of cheap alcohol and drinking at harmful levels. It is expected that introducing MUP in Wales would mean a reduction in the significant and widespread harms caused by the excessive consumption of alcohol.

We were therefore delighted that under the Public Health Minimum Price for Alcohol Wales Act 2018, MUP became law in Wales, effective from 2 March 2020. We strongly believe that this will improve health and save lives.

Given that our previous survey in 2018 had shown that only half of drinkers in Wales were aware of MUP, we subsequently worked with key stakeholders to raise public awareness of the measure. Our particular focus was on placing accessible information about the measure in local media, and on supporting organisations to ensure that their membership and/or clients are familiar with the measure and its implications.

Public engagement was high: a bilingual Q&A MUP page on our website drew 17,000 page views, and a Wales Online article based on it had around 30,000 visits.

Minimum unit pricing
will improve health
and save lives.



Just one of our many print and online pieces explaining minimum pricing

Supporting healthier drinking cultures

Alcohol-free drinks

Many of us have experienced being encouraged to drink when we don't really want to. And all of us live in a world in which drinking is considered the norm for adults. Alcohol Change UK aims to shift drinking cultures, so that everyone has a free choice to drink or not drink – whether for a round, an evening, or longer-term.

Our alcohol-free reviews are part of this work. We publish and share reviews of low and no alcohol drinks to help keep consumers informed about the ever-increasing range available in Wales. Our Alcohol Change UK website now hosts reviews of over 150 beers, wines, ciders and other drinks under 1% ABV (most at 0.5% or 0.0% ABV).

While there is a need to understand in more detail how these products are being used and by whom, they may be a useful tool in reducing alcohol harm. There is evidence that people drinking at risky levels are finding them an effective means to reduce their consumption. We have now commissioned research to better understand the role of low and no alcohol drinks, which will be published later in 2020.

During the year, we also hosted our 'Pub with no booze' stall at the Newport Food and Drink Festival and at the Welsh Government offices in Merthyr Tydfil and Cardiff. These events have proven to offer an effective way to start conversations about drinking in an unforced and non-judgemental manner.



Some of the diverse guests to our alcohol-free drinks stall at the Newport Food and Drink Festival



Improving knowledge

Selling alcohol responsibly



Halloween vodka in Morrison's and "Teachers' Treats" in Marks and Spencer



between aisles, or in large stacks at the store entrance – despite previous pledges by the alcohol industry to avoid such tactics.

We are urging decision-makers in Wales to consider the applicability here of the Scottish legislative model which mandates

that alcohol displays should be confined to a single area of each store.

The more we know about alcohol harm, the easier it is to reduce it. One important aspect of this is understanding how retailers in Wales promote and sell alcohol. At the end of March 2020 we published 'All over the shop', our analysis of supermarket alcohol displays in Wales throughout 2019.

Every month, one or more supermarkets were making a specially-themed push to increase alcohol sales.

We found that every month, one or more supermarkets were making a specially-themed push to increase alcohol sales. Examples of events promoted as drinking occasions included Mothers' Day, Easter, Wimbledon tennis, Pride, Halloween, and Bonfire Night. During the summer months, supermarkets encouraged customers to "Taste the summer" and "Say cheers with summer beers". As the weather got colder, alcohol was promoted as an accompaniment to "Cosy nights in" and "Curry night".

A small number of these promotions took place on drinks aisles, but most were sited away from the normal alcohol shelves – on the ends of aisles, on floor space

UK-wide research

Throughout the year, in collaboration with our colleagues in London and the Alcohol Health Alliance, we have published research reports and evidence reviews exploring a variety of themes, including alcohol labelling, disordered eating, and mental health, as well as factsheets on topics like alcohol-related brain damage and alcohol and cancer.

These reports and factsheets, which are available to download for free from our website, will help inform our future work in Wales.

Supporting adults with complex needs

The Blue Light approach

We are continuing to promote our successful Blue Light approach to working with some of Wales's most vulnerable people: those often referred to as 'change-resistant drinkers'.

This group of people are defined by their reliance on public, often emergency, services. They drink heavily while also facing a number of other challenges: mental health problems, ill-health, homelessness. Too often, they are considered to be beyond help. The revolutionary Blue Light approach asserts that this is not the case. No heavy drinker is beyond help.

This group of people do, however, require a different kind of support. The Blue Light approach sets out positive strategies that can be used with this group.

One notable output from the project has been our 'Learning from tragedies' report, which examined 11 Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs) in which alcohol was identified as a significant factor in the person's life and/or death. The report highlighted a number of important issues:

- The frequent occurrence of a 'perfect storm' of physical and mental health problems among vulnerable drinkers, leaving them isolated and reluctant to engage with services.
- The pressing need for multi-agency groups to manage the cases of the most vulnerable adults. Many of the people whose cases were considered in the report had a huge number of contacts with services, but there was often little or no co-ordination across service boundaries.
- The need for assertive outreach to build relationships with people who show no obvious desire to engage with services.

The Blue Light approach challenges the belief that only drinkers who show clear motivation to change can be helped, and sets out positive strategies that can be used with these vulnerable people.

The Blue Light approach challenges the belief that only drinkers who show clear motivation to change can be helped.

Bringing professionals together

'Alcohol and everything else' conference

We know that alcohol is many people's favourite 'coping mechanism' for anxiety, depression and other forms of mental distress. It may be used to mask childhood trauma, or to live more easily with autism in a world that's far from autism-friendly. Similarly, drinking may be tied up with a co-occurring eating disorder, or it may be contributing to a worsening gambling habit or offering a temporary escape from it.

There are generally support services to help people manage each of these issues. However, for the person seeking help, these are not individual problems to be dealt with one-by-one, and they can't necessarily be disentangled and distributed between various agencies. Any one of them may be impossible to solve without due regard to the others. Failing to recognise the complex and diverse needs of drinkers could mean that we're excluding many from the help they deserve.

At our Wales annual conference, which took place in September 2019 at Wrexham Glyndŵr University, we explored how we can ensure that fewer people fall through the gaps in services.

Delegates heard from and interacted with experts from the University of South Wales Addictions Research Group, the Centre for Applied Autism Research at Bath, Mind in Bradford, the Living Room Cardiff, and others. They also heard from the award-winning journalist and author Catherine Gray about her twenty years of heavy drinking and the unexpected joy of being sober.

The feedback from the event was universally positive, with the day described as "diverse, stimulating, informative – shedding new light on a familiar phenomenon", with "a fantastic variety of speakers and subjects" and an opportunity to "meet new people and (hear) new perspectives."



Our annual conference considered what we can do when drinking isn't the only issue

Changing behaviour year-round through Dry January

The national campaign

Dry January is the annual campaign through which millions of people give up alcohol for the month of January and change their drinking longer-term.

Dry January began in 2013 and has been growing ever since: just under 102,000 people signed up for the campaign this year; up from 79,000 last year, and our highest ever total. Dry January has now become a cultural phenomenon. In 2020, more than 4 million people across the UK attempted to have a Dry January. People who sign up receive a daily motivational email throughout January and access to a premium-quality but free app, Try Dry, which allows them to track their units, calories and money saved through Dry January. Those who sign up are twice as likely as those who take on the challenge independently to stay alcohol-free the whole month, and to get longer-term benefits.

Independent research has found that people who take on Dry January drink more riskily than the general population (as measured by AUDIT-C, a tool developed by the World Health Organisation). Yet six months after the challenge ends their average drinking risk score has decreased dramatically – in contrast to people who do not take on

Dry January, whose risk scores remain similar. Previous research showed:

- Drinking days per week dropped on average from 4.3 to 3.3;
- Units consumed per drinking day dropped on average from 8.6 to 7.1;
- Frequency of drunkenness fell on average from 3.4 per month to 2.1 per month.⁶

Being alcohol-free for 31 days, whether during January, or any other time, shows us that we don't need alcohol to have fun, to relax and to socialise. That means that for the rest of the year we are better able to make decisions about our drinking, and to avoid slipping into drinking more than we really want to.

People who take on Dry January are still drinking less riskily six months after the challenge ends.

A hyper-local approach

A feature of Dry January in Wales this year was our hyperlocal Dry January community project in Fishguard and Goodwick, the site of our previous

'Communities together' project which ran from 2014 to 2017 with the aim of creating opportunities for local people to devise and implement their own ideas for promoting healthier drinking habits. We sought to carry the same spirit into the 2020 Dry January campaign there – trying to find out what local people wanted from Dry January and how we could make the campaign work for them.

We can say with some confidence that the local campaign was a success, engaging with a wide range of people and asking them to consider their own drinking habits. Community-level work like this to initiate mainly offline conversations about alcohol is time-heavy, in that trust and relationships have to be built up over time, but the rewards are potentially huge.



The Fishguard and Goodwick Dry January campaign was publicised with leaflets and posters, local newspaper articles, and via local websites and social networks.

6. Full research findings available from Alcohol Change UK, on request.

Alcohol Change UK in Wales
8 Museum Place
Cardiff CF10 3BG
www.alcoholchange.org.uk
@ACCymru and @AlcoholChangeUK

Wales Director: **Andrew Misell**
Senior Research & Policy Manager: **Mark Leyshon**

Alcohol Change UK is the operating name of Alcohol Research UK.
Registered office 27 Swinton Street, London WC1X 9NW.
Registered charity number 1140287.
Company limited by guarantee in England and Wales number 7462605.