

Building a healthy recovery

Addressing
alcohol harm
in **Wales** during
and after the
pandemic



Why Wales needs a healthy recovery

During the past year, people in Wales have experienced stresses of a kind we never expected. As well as its direct health impacts, the pandemic has brought social isolation, financial insecurity, strained relationships, and additional caring responsibilities for many. It's not surprising that we've seen an increase in the use of alcohol as a coping mechanism, and a resultant increase in harm.

As the people of Wales get ready to elect their representatives in the Senedd, six of the country's leading alcohol charities are setting out what we believe needs to be done over the next five years to help Wales build a healthy recovery.

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Make reducing alcohol harm a national priority

The pandemic has left many more of us at risk of alcohol harm. Research by Alcohol Change UK has found that nearly a third of people say they drank more alcohol in 2020 than in 2019, with many saying they have been drinking to cope. Most worryingly, people who were already drinking heavily are the most likely to report drinking even more during the pandemic. There are already early indications of serious health consequences: provisional figures from the Office for National Statistics show that alcohol-specific deaths in England and Wales hit a new high during 2020.



Our recommendation

With the current Welsh Government Substance Misuse Delivery Plan coming to an end in 2022, all parties need to commit to renewing the Plan and to properly resourcing its implementation throughout the next Senedd term from 2021 to 2026. This would make a very public statement that there is cross-party agreement that reducing alcohol harm must remain a national priority and that everyone experiencing alcohol problems in Wales should get the support they need.

Ensure local support to meet diverse needs

As well as increasing alcohol harm, the pandemic has made it more difficult to access support for alcohol problems. Services in Wales have led the way in meeting this challenge, rapidly and creatively adapting their ways of working. Much more help and advice are now offered remotely, and some agencies have been able to use technology to support people they were not reaching previously. Services have also worked hard to make safe provision for people who need face-to-face contact.

The demand for alcohol support is unlikely to reduce, even as the vaccine roll-out reaches more people. With much pent-up demand from people who are not yet accessing services, the UK Government's Recovery Champion, Dr Ed Day, has already predicted *"an increased need for treatment and recovery support services as the pandemic recedes"*.

Our recommendation

The experiences of the past twelve months have shown just how important it is that support is available for people struggling with alcohol problems, in ways they can access easily, safely, and without shame or stigma. Wales needs to learn the lessons of the pandemic and ensure the right balance of online and face-to-face support in all parts of our country.



Address the hidden harm to drinkers' families

Many of us have been staying home to stay safe. But for the families of chaotic drinkers, the home can be a place of conflict and danger. It can also be an exhausting place, with families shouldering a huge burden of unpaid care work. Children and young people growing up in an environment like this can face a host of long-term challenges in life.

In normal times, activities outside the home often offer a lifeline, but with many such opportunities closed off during the pandemic, Adfam has found that 42% of people coping with a family member's substance misuse say that their loved-one's harmful behaviour has increased, whilst half say that their own mental health has worsened.



Our recommendation

Support for the families of people with alcohol problems is a core component of effective alcohol support. As well as benefitting families themselves, it increases their loved one's chances of recovery. The continuation of the remote support for families that has developed during the lockdown must be a priority, alongside a return to face-to-face support outside the home as soon as this can be safely provided.

Six charities working to reduce alcohol harm in Wales have joined forces to publish this manifesto. Together, Adfam, Alcohol Change UK, Barod, CAIS, Kaleidoscope, and WCADA are urging candidates from all parties in this year's Senedd elections to commit to building a healthy recovery.

If you'd like to register your support for our proposals to support people struggling with alcohol issues, and their families, please do get in touch via the contact details below.

Contact

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