

Our work in Wales

2025-26

ALCOHOL
CHANGE^{UK}

We are **Alcohol Change UK.**

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

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

We're not anti-alcohol. We are against the harm that it causes. Alcohol harm affects millions of families, damaging and ending lives. It impacts all of us, whether through a loved one's suffering, damaged communities or avoidable costs to frontline services. But alcohol harm is not inevitable.

We work across the UK to reduce alcohol harm. We do this with compassion, with ambition, and by seeking and telling the truth about alcohol harm and how to end it.

This report highlights our work in Wales from April 2025 to March 2026.



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Andrew Misell
Director for Wales,
Alcohol Change UK

Welcome

It's been another busy and productive year at Alcohol Change UK in Wales, as we work to reduce the harm that alcohol can cause.

We've been pleased to be able to bring together professionals and people with lived experience from Wales and the broader UK to discuss the issues and work out solutions together. As you'll see from this short report, we've been getting to grips with some complex and sensitive topics, where there isn't always one obvious answer – such as how to advise on the use of low-alcohol drinks during pregnancy; and how to balance autonomy and safety when serving alcohol in care homes.

We've been out and about, introducing people to the massive range of alcohol-free drinks now on offer. And we've made new connections – such as our work with Muslim communities in Wales, where we've been having open and honest conversations about issues that have previously been somewhat hidden.

As well as looking back on the last twelve months, we're looking ahead to see what more we can do. If you want to work with us to reduce alcohol harm in Wales, get in touch. We'd love to hear from you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Misell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Andrew Misell
Director for Wales

Our online learning events

Our online learning events remain a well-established part of our work, with three delivered over the past 12 months.

In June 2025, we hosted *Double Jeopardy*, which aimed to strengthen understanding of the intersection between alcohol and gambling harms. Contributors explored issues such as the compounded stigma experienced by women, parallels between gambling marketing and the historical trajectory of alcohol promotion, and key gaps in support that alcohol services should be aware of.

Our annual conference, *Changing Times*, followed in November 2025. It brought together researchers, practitioners, and women with lived experience to explore how alcohol impacts women at different life stages, alongside the development of practical, tailored responses within healthcare and support services. Discussions included emerging research on attitudes



Chelsey Flood shares her personal perspective on alcohol with Alcohol Change UK's Andrew Misell.
[Watch on YouTube](#)

towards alcohol-free and low-alcohol products during pregnancy, approaches to supporting reduced consumption in midlife, and efforts to strengthen menopause support within treatment services.

In March 2026, we held our final event of the period, *Dignity and Choice*, focusing on one of the most complex and pressing challenges facing alcohol services: ensuring dignity, autonomy and compassion at the end of life. Expert speakers shared insights on sensitively approaching end-of-life conversations, planning appropriately as individuals near death, and managing alcohol use during this stage.

"It was engaging and interesting and I walked away with lots to think about and consider how to apply to practice."

We will continue to build on this work to share knowledge and build connections in the year ahead, including a planned online event in July 2026 exploring the role of cooking, eating and social connection in reducing alcohol harm and supporting recovery.

"ACUK's events bring together a high quality range of speakers."

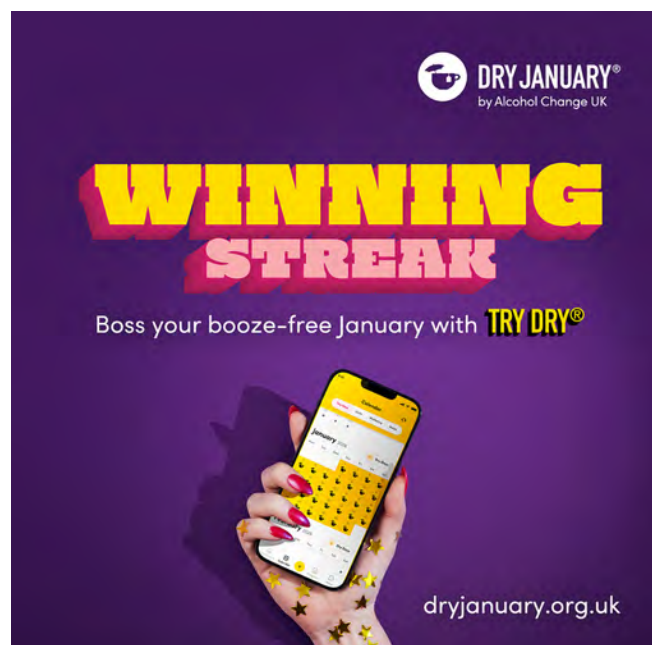
"It really was an excellent conference, so valuable and I will be sharing my experience with my colleagues to encourage them to attend future events too."

The 2026 Dry January® Challenge

This year's Dry January® challenge saw thousands of people kick start a change in their relationship with alcohol using Alcohol Change UK's free tools and resources, including our Try Dry® app, daily motivational content, and an active online community.

By taking on the challenge, participants throughout the UK and globally experienced what life can be like with less alcohol in their lives, gaining invaluable learning and new skills for taking control of their drinking for February and beyond.

Going alcohol free in January isn't always easy, with big alcohol companies spending millions to keep their products in the spotlight and glamorising alcohol as central to everyday experiences. But when it comes



to birthdays, weddings or date nights, it's our friends and family – not the alcohol – that should be the real stars of the show.

We worked to support organisations across the UK to promote the Dry January® challenge in their communities, including local authorities, workplaces, charity partners and health teams. This further enabled people of all backgrounds to participate and feel the benefits of a month off alcohol. Through our Try Dry® Local partnerships, including for the first time in Wales, we're enabling partners to better integrate the Dry January® challenge

alongside local alcohol strategies – promoting prevention before more serious alcohol issues take hold.

More broadly, a record 19 million people across the UK changed what they drank in January, with an estimated 10.7m having an alcohol-free month and a further 8.3m cutting down.*

It's encouraging to see so many people choosing to try a break from alcohol – with many of those taking on the Dry January® challenge discovering that there's nothing to lose and a whole lot to gain. Here are just a few reflections from those who took part this year:

"I've noticed increased energy in the evenings and also the morning getting the kids up for school. Don't want to go back to the fuzzy head feeling."

"It feels incredible to see that 30-day streak on the app today. Honestly, those digital badges are doing more for my motivation than I ever expected!"

"Slowly, the small steps added up to real behaviour change with tangible health benefits."

* (Source: Censuswide for Alcohol Change UK, February 2026)

Alcohol-free drinks

In October 2025, we hosted our popular 'Pub with no booze' stall at the Newport Food Festival, offering free samples of alcohol-free and low-alcohol drinks. These included Drop Bear beer from Swansea, Red Hog cider from Llandeilo, and Tiny Rebel ale from Newport.

Alcohol-free and low-alcohol drinks continue to increase in popularity, as more people look to cut down on their drinking or take a break from alcohol. This reflects growing awareness of the impact of alcohol on health, as well as better availability and quality of these products. We saw this interest at the festival, where many people were keen to try alternatives that still felt social and enjoyable.

This was the fifth time we have taken part in the festival. As always, it provided a great opportunity to have informal conversations with people about how they manage their alcohol use. We estimate that we spoke to around 300 people over the course of the day!



Lots of people were keen to share their experiences of alcohol-free drinks at our 'Pub with no booze' stall.

"The festival gives us the chance to speak to hundreds of people we might not usually reach. It creates a relaxed setting where we can have informal conversations about alcohol, while visitors enjoy free samples of the latest alcohol-free drinks."

Better alcohol support in Muslim communities

Over the past year, we have been working with drug and alcohol support services and Muslim community members in south Wales, with the twin aims of increasing the understanding of alcohol and other drug issues as they affect Muslim people and communities, and improving the support around alcohol and other drugs that is available to this group.

The project has grown out of a recognition that, for Muslim communities to effectively address drug and alcohol issues, drug and alcohol services need to become

more culturally competent, and that the best way to achieve this is for support to be co-designed and co-delivered with communities.

To date, we have hosted two workshops with drug and alcohol workers and Muslim faith leaders from Cardiff, Newport and Swansea, as well as representatives of the NHS and the police. There was a recognition that substance use remains a very hidden issue in Muslim communities, and one still surrounded by a degree of shame, and treatment services reported that Muslims were under-represented in the treatment population.

There is a consensus in support of developing training together – so that Muslim community leaders and organisers understand more about drug and alcohol issues; drug and alcohol services understand more about Muslim faith and life; and both parties will be able to provide better support. We are also keen to build long-term links between local drug and alcohol services and local Muslim organisations, so that it becomes normal for them to be in regular contact with each other – not just when there are serious issues to address.



Our workshops brought together alcohol and drug workers and Muslim faith leaders to discuss alcohol issues.

“This project moves beyond the idea that some people and communities are ‘hard to reach’, recognising that this supposed status is often a result of ineffective engagement approaches.”

Alcohol-free drinks in pregnancy

In December 2025, we published the findings of research we commissioned from the University of Plymouth, based on the views and experiences of more than 2,000 currently or recently pregnant women regarding low-alcohol and alcohol-free drinks. The study found that 71% of respondents had consumed alcohol-free or low-alcohol drinks during pregnancy, and this figure rose to 91% among those reporting higher levels of alcohol consumption pre-pregnancy.

“Choosing a safer alternative” to alcohol whilst pregnant was the reason most commonly given for using these drinks, yet many respondents also said they feel there is a lack of guidance from healthcare professionals about these alternatives, prompting calls for clearer information and support.

The UK’s Chief Medical Officers advise a “precautionary approach” with regards to alcohol and pregnancy, and it is clear that many pregnant women are using low-alcohol drinks (usually 0.5% ABV) during pregnancy as a risk-reduction tool. However, the safety of this practice cannot be proven either way, which makes issuing definitive advice difficult.

Since the publication of the report, we have encountered interest from some professionals in supporting the use of low-alcohol drinks as a pragmatic harm reduction measure but have also encountered some understandable reluctance to flex the existing guidance in any way by taking a more permissive approach to drinks with an alcoholic strength greater than 0.0%.

We will be continuing our work in this field and consulting as widely as possible to see what kind of consensus can be reached.



“It is clear that many pregnant women are using low-alcohol drinks during pregnancy as a risk-reduction tool. However, the safety of this practice cannot be proven either way, which makes issuing definitive advice difficult.”

Alcohol use in care homes: getting the balance right

In February 2026, we published a research report that we had commissioned from Practice Solutions and Age Cymru, exploring policy and practice on the use of alcohol in care homes for older people in Wales.

The research was undertaken to try to answer the questions of how to respect choice while keeping people safe, and how to allow enjoyment without causing harm. The researchers conducted a survey, and spoke with care home staff and managers, sector leaders, and care home residents across Wales.



The findings highlighted the complexity of trying to balance residents' rights to enjoy consuming alcohol with the need to keep all residents and staff safe and well.

Research participants noted the importance for many residents of being free to choose alcoholic drinks – to feel at home and in control of their own lives, and for socialising with others. On the other hand, care home staff spoke of the challenges they face when seeking to respectfully take care of people whose drinking behaviour is harming themselves and/or disturbing others.

Despite being a relatively small-scale project, the research team were able to suggest several practical measures that could help achieve the necessary balance between autonomy and safety. In particular, they propose that care homes should



consider having a specific alcohol policy and may wish to review whether alcohol is adequately covered within their current staff training programmes.

Building on this research, we have produced two sets of easy-to-use bilingual resources, namely a conversation starter kit to help care home residents express their wishes and concerns about alcohol, and a set of scenario cards to guide care home staff in planning for future situations involving alcohol. These resources are available on our website.

“The research findings highlight the complexity of balancing individual residents’ right to choose to drink alcohol, with the need to keep all residents and staff safe and well.”

Our team in Wales is small but vastly experienced, and is committed to helping create a society that is free from the harm caused by alcohol.



Director for Wales:
Andrew Misell

Andrew is Alcohol Change UK's Director for Wales. He has been responsible for the development and delivery of the charity's work in Wales since 2009.



Senior Research and Policy Manager:
Mark Cenic-Leyshon

Mark also joined Alcohol Change UK in 2009. His role involves supporting the Director for Wales in the development and delivery of the charity's work in Wales, identifying and delivering research projects, and using his strong networks to influence alcohol policy.



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