

# Our manifesto for a future free from alcohol harm

Alcohol harm presents an urgent and growing problem: to families across the UK, to the NHS and the public purse, and for the widening inequalities within our society. Alcohol harm is preventable and there is a great opportunity for meaningful change that will significantly improve the lives of generations to come. The Alcohol Health Alliance calls on all political parties to commit to action on alcohol harm with a comprehensive evidence-based strategy, free from alcohol industry influence. **Our key manifesto asks for the UK Government are:**

## Protect children and support people impacted by alcohol harm

Children have the right to grow up and live in a safe, nurturing, and healthy environment that is free from exposure to harmful marketing. However, the alcohol industry frequently places its adverts in bus stops near schools, on television before 9pm, and on websites and social media. There is no escape from alcohol marketing. Evidence shows that it encourages children to drink more and at an earlier age, exposing them to significant harm. Marketing also prolongs people's dependence and undermines their treatment and recovery.

By introducing higher standards for how the industry can market and sell its products we can provide children and people impacted by alcohol harm – including those in recovery – with better chances of leading healthier, happier, longer lives. Regulations have been developed to safeguard the marketing of 'unhealthy' food and soft drinks which, if applied to alcohol, would be a significant step forward.

**We call on the government to take the following actions to protect children and support people impacted by alcohol harm:**

- Include alcohol in the definition of 'unhealthy products' under the marketing regulations for products high in fat, sugar and salt
- Give responsibility for ensuring alcohol marketing practices adhere to higher standards to an independent body with no links to the alcohol or advertising industries



## Empower individuals and build thriving communities

Everyone deserves the opportunity to make healthy choices for themselves, their families and their communities. However, current product labels are clearly failing consumers, with the alcohol industry continuing to keep people in the dark about the contents and health risks of its products. This is despite some alcohol products containing more than 100% of the daily recommended sugar intake, and alcohol being causally linked to over 200 illnesses including liver and heart disease, stroke and 7 types of cancer.

Local authorities want to make decisions in the interest of their communities, but there is no legal objective currently in place in England and Wales to consider public health when making decisions about the availability of alcohol.

**We call on the government to take the following action to empower people to lead healthy lives and build thriving communities:**

- Introduce mandatory alcohol product labelling that provides consumers with information relating to ingredients, calories, units, Chief Medical Officers' guidelines, and health risks such as alcohol during pregnancy and cancer
- Include 'public health' as a licensing objective in England and Wales so that licensing bodies have to consider local alcohol harm data when making their decisions

## Strengthen the NHS and frontline services

The NHS has been providing world-class, life-saving care for 75 years – it's what 4 out of 5 people say makes them proud to be British. We all want an NHS that will meet our needs for the next 75 years and beyond. Alcohol is responsible for nearly 1 million hospitalisations every year, and is estimated to cost health services £8.6 billion annually. Alcohol thus places an enormous - but preventable - strain on our already stretched NHS and frontline services.

By promoting good health policies and investing in prevention, early intervention, and treatment, we can save lives and reduce pressure on the NHS, in both the short and long term. Evidence shows that every £1 invested in treatment yields £3 of social return in its first year, increasing to £26 over ten years.



We call on the government to take the following actions to strengthen the NHS and frontline services:

- Commit to introducing evidence-based prevention policies – including reducing the availability, marketing and affordability of alcohol – to save lives and reduce pressure on the NHS
- Scale up and commit to long-term funding of proven and cost-effective early interventions and treatment across the UK, and deliver on better coordination between alcohol treatment and other services such as mental health, domestic abuse, and housing support
- Bring forward an effective cross-government strategy to reduce health inequalities, recognising the key role that alcohol plays in driving these inequalities

## Preserve the public purse

At a time of extreme pressure on public finances, all avoidable health and social costs must be minimised. Alcohol harm is estimated to cost UK society upwards of £27 billion each year, including costs linked to health, crime and lost productivity.

The UK government can both save lives and reduce alcohol harm in a cost-effective way by introducing prevention policies such as minimum unit pricing (MUP) and a fairer tax system that ensures the highest strength products are always taxed more. Evidence shows that since Scotland introduced MUP in 2018 alcohol specific deaths fell by 13% and hospitalisations fell by 4%. Similarly, when alcohol duty in the UK kept pace with inflation, deaths from alcohol-related liver disease fell.

We call on the government to take the following actions to preserve the public purse:

- Introduce minimum unit pricing for alcohol in England, to prevent the sale of ultra-cheap high strength drinks that lead to high social costs
- Ensure alcohol duty at least keeps pace with inflation and that all stronger products are always taxed at a higher rate than lower strength products.