

**Evidence.  
Policy.  
Partnership.**



Dear NSAPAG Members

In this first newsletter of 2024, there are number of data updates including estimates on

- drug-related deaths in Northern Ireland
- people presenting to drug and alcohol treatment services in Northern Ireland
- deaths among people who were homeless at the time of death in Ireland
- children using alcohol and living in homes where alcohol misuse occurs from the State of Nation's Children report for Ireland.

The February edition includes a number of blogs and information about current campaigns, including a call from WHO Europe on scaling up action on non-communicable disease prevention as well a report on the activities of the British-Irish Council Drugs and Alcohol Work Sector.

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## Data and Research

### **Drug-related and drug misuse deaths in Northern Ireland, 2012 to 2022**

Data on drug-related and drug misuse deaths in Northern Ireland, 2012-2022 have been published by NISRA. Figures are based on deaths registered in NI that are known to be drug-related or a direct consequence of drug misuse.



- In 2022, there were 154 registered drug-related deaths, a 40% increase on the number of drug deaths registered a decade ago.
- The number of deaths where alcohol is mentioned on the death certificate of drug-related deaths has

was 31.8%, falling to 17.6% in 2022.

[Read the report and tables here](#)

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## Deaths among people who were homeless at time of death in Ireland, 2020



The Health Research Board (HRB) has published 2020 data on the number of deaths and cause of death among people who were homeless when they died.

- There were 121 deaths among people who were homeless in 2020, equivalent to 10 deaths per month.
- Three quarters of all those who died were male. Half of the males who died were aged 42 years or younger and 36.5 years or younger for women.
- Almost all (91%) who died had a history of substance use. Heroin (61%) was the most common drug used by those with a history of drug use, followed by cocaine (56%), and benzodiazepines (36%). Of those that had used substances, over 4 in 10 were alcohol dependent.

[Read the full report here](#)

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## Statistics from the Northern Ireland Substance Misuse Database: 2022/23

The Department of Health report summarises information on people presenting to services with problem drug and/ or alcohol misuse and relates to the 12-month period ending 31 March 2023.



- In Northern Ireland in 2022/23, a total of 2,960 clients presented to services for problem substance misuse.
- Around two-fifths of clients presented to services indicating alcohol misuse only (38.6%, 1,142); over one-third of clients presented to services indicating problem drug use only (34.9%, 1,033);

- The majority of clients were male. Over a quarter of clients presenting to treatment for drugs only (29.7%) and just under a quarter for drugs & alcohol (22.8%) were female. However, around two-fifths of clients presenting to treatment for problem alcohol use only were female (42.5%).
- Of those clients presenting to services for drug misuse, almost three-fifths indicated daily use (56.2%); of those clients attending for problem alcohol use, over two-fifths (43.5%) indicated daily consumption of alcohol.

[Read the report here](#)

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## North Dublin Regional DATF alcohol research 2023: an exploration of the nature and extent of alcohol use within North County Dublin.



This research led by Prof Jo-Hanna Ivers and Neil Dunne included a systematic review of international literature; analysis of data from the National Drug Treatment Reporting System (NDTRS) and Planet Youth Survey in North Dublin; and interviews with key stakeholders, including experts by experience, policymakers, service providers, and active service users, aiming to generate recommendations for reducing the harms associated with harmful and hazardous drinking.

[Read the report here](#)

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## State of the Nation's Children

The State of the Nation's Children report provides a comprehensive picture of children's lives in Ireland. It presents key information on children's health, behavioural and educational outcomes, and their relationships with their parents and their friends. Some of the key findings in the report include:



days. This decreased between 2014 and 2018.

- In 2018, 69.4% of children aged 10–17 reported never having had an alcoholic drink. This increased between 2014 and 2018.

[Read the full report here](#)

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## **The associations of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) with substance use in young adults: a systematic review**

**Sage Journals**

This review aimed to summarise the associations between exposure to ACEs before the age of 18 years and subsequent drug or alcohol use between the ages of 18 and 25 years. The review provides clear evidence that exposure to multiple ACEs is a robust risk factor for the use of alcohol, cannabis and other drugs by young adults. Poor self-regulation and maladaptive coping strategies were identified as mechanisms explaining this link; however, further detailed research is needed.

[Read the article here](#)

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## **Dispelling Six Industry Myths About Alcohol Taxation**

In this report, the Institute of Alcohol Studies look at six of the most prevalent arguments made by the alcohol industry when it seeks to have duty cut or frozen and demonstrate why these are fallacious.



[Read the report here](#)

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## **No- and low-alcohol drinks in Great Britain: Monitoring Report**



Monitoring report

University of Stirling | STIRLING | UCL | NIHR

low-alcohol drinks more available and popular in Great Britain can improve people's health. The report draws on analyses of commercial market research data along with survey data to provide a detailed description of the no/lo drinks market in Britain, who drinks these products and how that is changing over time. It also offers insights into pricing, market concentration and differences between the off-trade and on-trade sectors. Key findings from the report note that:

- In 2022, one-third of adults consumed no/lo alcohol drinks at least once in the last year, 18% consumed no/lo drinks at least once a month, and 10% at least once a week
- People drinking at risky levels are more likely to consume no/lo drinks regularly than lighter drinkers or non-drinkers
- No/lo drinks are more expensive than standard alcoholic beverages – this means health inequalities may widen if people from more deprived households cannot afford them
- Major alcohol brands dominate the no/lo drinks market and account for 98 per cent of no/lo beer sales in shops.

[Read the report here](#)

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## Road Safety Authority of Ireland Conference

Ireland's Road Safety Authority hosted a conference in Dublin on the issue of drink-driving. Presentations including updates on data and the alcohol interlock programme are available [here](#).



Please note that a presentation on alcohol interlock will be included in the agenda for our next NSAPAG meeting in May 2024.

[Access materials from the conference here](#)

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## Ministerial appointments in Northern Ireland



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Mr Robin Swann has been appointed Health Minister for Northern Ireland. Ms Liz Kimmins has been appointed Chairperson of the Health Committee, with Mr Danny Donnelly taking up the position of Deputy Chairperson. Meanwhile, Mrs Naomi Long has been appointed Minister for Justice and Mr Gordon Lyons has been appointed Minister for Communities.

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## Sale of Alcohol Bill (Ireland)

Minister McEntee has indicated her intention to bring forward a shorter Bill to provide for key reforms including the standardisation of opening hours for pubs and off-licences. It will also introduce an annual late bar and night club permits, enforcement powers for An Garda Síochana as well as cultural amenity licences.



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[Read the full response here](#)

Meanwhile, a range of health and social groups have registered their opposition to the Bill and called for a Health Impact Assessment.

[Read the full article here](#)

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## Minimum Unit Pricing of Alcohol in Scotland



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Deputy First Minister [Shona Robison \(Scottish National Party\)](#) announced the intention to lay before Parliament draft orders to continue minimum unit pricing beyond 30 April 2024 and to set the price per unit at 65p. Updated modelling by the University of Sheffield shows that increasing the minimum price per unit of alcohol to 65p is estimated to avert an additional 60 alcohol-specific deaths and 774 fewer hospital admissions in the first year.

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## Drugs and Alcohol Work Sector Report on Work Sector Activity 2021 – 2024

This report summarises the activities of the British-Irish Council Drugs and Alcohol Work Sector 2021-2024. In the foreword, Jim Walsh (Government of Ireland representative and Official Chair of the Drugs and Alcohol Work Sector) noted that this report demonstrates the relevance of the British-Irish Council to policy concerns about alcohol and drug use across the Member Administrations. There has been a richness and vibrancy to the discussions and analyses of the work sector over the last three years, which would not have occurred without the structure of the Council.



[Read the report here](#)

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## 'Pints' of wine stocked on Britain's shelves for the first time ever



A press release by the UK Government has reported that 'Pint' size wine can be stocked on Britain's shelves for the first time ever *thanks to new freedoms* from leaving the European Union. Still and sparkling wine is to be sold in 200ml, 500ml and 568ml 'pint' sizes in 2024 and it is reported that 900 British vineyards are set to benefit from *new freedoms*. It was reported that the move to introduce the 568ml size would sit alongside the 200ml and 500ml measures already available, *offering more flexibility and choice for customers*. These optional reforms from Government have come about as a result of the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 and are *wholeheartedly backed by industry wanting to reduce burdensome regulations*. The UK Government states that the changes will help to boost innovation, increase

[Read the press release here](#)

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## Campaigns

### Scotland's First Minister commits to reduce children's exposure to alcohol marketing

The First Minister Humza Yousaf has signed up to support a [joint campaign](#) from Alcohol Focus Scotland, Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs, Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems and BMA Scotland. In a new video the First Minister acknowledges that children and young people in Scotland have a high level of awareness of alcohol brands, and that this exposure to alcohol marketing can lead to them drinking. He said, "The Scottish Government is fully committed to improving public health and reducing the health risks faced by young people. When we improve the welfare of children in Scotland we make a positive difference for generations to come. So I fully support the campaign to reduce children and young people's exposure to alcohol marketing."



[Read more about the campaign here](#)

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### Alcohol Marketing: Explained



The Institute of Alcohol Studies has launched its third film in the *Explained series*, which focuses on alcohol marketing. In this video, Professor David Jernigan (University of Boston), Alison Douglas (Alcohol Focus Scotland), and Dr Amanda Atkinson (Liverpool John Moores University) look at: the link between alcohol marketing and young people's drinking; how it affects those in recovery; how alcohol marketing intersects with perceived gender and gender



marketing is a human rights issue.

[Watch the video here](#)

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## **A renewed call to action: How can the European Union scale-up action on non-communicable disease prevention?**

A new report from WHO Europe looks at the progress of legal initiatives aimed at prevention of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) risk factors and wider health determinants under the European Commission's Europe's Beating Cancer Plan. It also explores how the European Union (EU) can use its policy levers to strengthen prevention and tackle NCDs. In the introduction, alcohol is listed as one of the risk factors causing a significant proportion of preventable burden of disease. Prevention policies tackling alcohol use are mentioned throughout alongside tobacco, air pollutions and unhealthy foods. The report states that "The absence of foreseen legislative EU action on reducing the harmful use of tobacco and alcohol and empowering consumers to make healthier and more sustainable food choices, continue to undermine efforts to address some key factors which exacerbate the burden of NCDs. We thus strongly recommend that evidence-based actions under the EBCP are adopted in order to achieve their projected public health impact without further delay."



[Read the full report here](#)

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## **Blog**

### **Conflicts of interest in alcohol policy: What do UK policy actors think about industry involvement?**



In this blog published by the Institute of Alcohol Studies, Dr Katherine Severi and Dr Benjamin

established guidelines and varying perceptions among policy actors highlight the need for clearer definitions and principles to safeguard public health policies from commercial interference.

[Read the blog here](#)

## **Children of alcohol-dependent parents programme abandoned by government**

In this blog, Dr Piers Henriques (Director of Communications, Nacoa) discusses how the UK government has abandoned its strategy to support children of alcohol-dependent parents, despite a 10% year-on-year rise in calls to the national charity Nacoa. Dr Piers Henriques, explains how we got to this point and what his suggestions for an incoming government are.

[Read the blog here](#)

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## **What do we know about adults who combine smoking and at-risk drinking in England?**

This blog, published by the Alcohol Health Alliance, highlights that smoking and drinking are major health concerns, and when combined, increase a person's risk of poor mental health, heart conditions, and cancer. Dr Claire Garnett (Research Fellow, University of Bristol) discusses her latest study looking at the prevalence and characteristics of adults in England who both smoke and drink alcohol at risky levels, the health impacts that need for targeted support.



[Read the blog here](#)

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## **Parliamentary debates**



discussions with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on the potential impact of alcohol duty on levels of public health.

[Read the response here](#)

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**[Peter Gibson \(Con\)](#)**: To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she is taking to tackle liver disease in the North East.

[Read the response here](#)

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**[Sara Britcliffe \(Con\)](#)**: asked the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to support the children of alcohol-dependent parents.

[Read the response here](#)

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is taking to reduce geographic variations in the provision of non-invasive liver scans in community diagnostic centres.

[Read the response here](#)

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## Consultations

### Departments of Justice and Communities in Northern Ireland launch anti-social behaviour consultation

The Department of Justice and the Department for Communities have launched a joint public consultation on potential amendments to the legislative framework aimed at ensuring the relevant authorities have effective and proportionate powers in place to deal with anti-social behaviour. The public consultation will consider Anti-Social Behaviour Orders; Drinking in Public; Injunctions Against Anti-Social Behaviour; and Absolute Grounds for Possession in social housing. The consultation will run until 4 March 2024.



Views can be submitted at [Anti-Social Behaviour | Department of Justice \(justice-ni.gov.uk\)](#) or via citizenspace at [Anti-Social Behaviour Consultation - NI Direct - Citizen Space](#).



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