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Dear Members of the North South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group,

This newsletter provides updates on recent alcohol research and policy relevant to Ireland and Northern Ireland.

In the November edition there are a number of data publications specific to Ireland and Northern Ireland. These include the HRB 'Regional alcohol-related harm - County level factsheet', the 2022 Annual Report of the Medical Bureau of Road Safety and the Department of Health (Northern Ireland) Young People's Behaviour and Attitudes Survey 2022.

This month's issue includes a series of parliamentary questions and Seanad debates on alcohol and related issues in the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Also featured are a number of upcoming consultations in Northern Ireland and the UK, including Minimum Unit Pricing of alcohol, alcohol labelling, clinical guidelines for treatment and substance use strategy commissioning and implementation.

Data and research

Regional alcohol-related harm - County level factsheet



This report, by the Health Research Board, examines alcohol use and alcohol-related harms by county level, where available. The Department of Health and Social Care has published its Suicide Prevention Strategy for England. This is the first suicide prevention strategy to include specific recommendations in relation to alcohol use and suicide risk. The strategy sets out the government's ambitions over the next 5 years to:

reduce suicide rates; improve support for people who have self-harmed and improve support for people bereaved by suicide.

[Read the report here](#)

Digital interventions for reducing alcohol use in general populations: An updated systematic review and meta-analysis

This article updates a 2017 review on the effectiveness of digital interventions for reducing alcohol use in the general population. It found that individuals randomized to the digital interventions drank fewer grams of alcohol per day, had fewer drinking days per week, drank less alcohol per drinking day, had fewer heavy episodic drinking occasions per month, and had an alcohol use disorders identification test (AUDIT) score lower than individuals in the control group. The authors concluded that digital interventions show potential for reducing alcohol use in general populations and could be used widely at the population level to reduce alcohol-attributable harms.



[Read the abstract here](#)

Medical Bureau of Road Safety 2022 Annual Report



The Medical Bureau of Road Safety provide data on driving under the influence of intoxicants. The data includes the number of tests, gender, age and levels of alcohol detected. Alcohol remains the most frequently detected intoxicant in drivers. The median alcohol level in blood was 168mg/100ml and in urine was 198mg/100ml when specimens with no trace of alcohol were excluded. The authors reported that alcohol intoxicated driving remains a very significant danger on Irish road with many drivers driving when several times over the legally set limit of 50mg/100ml (blood) and 67mg/100ml (urine) with lesser limits of 20mg/100ml for specific drivers (learner, novice, professional and heavy vehicle driver). [Access the report here](#)

The Young Persons Behaviour & Attitudes Survey 2022: Substance Use (Smoking, Alcohol & Drugs)

The Department of Health in Northern Ireland recently published findings on substance use from the 2022 Young Person's Behaviour and Attitudes Survey. Around a third (31%) of young people reported ever having drunk alcohol; this is similar to the previous survey finding of 29% in 2019 though is around half the rate found in the 2000 survey (59%). Boys were more likely to report having taken a drink (33%) than girls (29%) and those in Year 12 (age 15/16) (64%) were more likely to have done so than those in Year 8 (age 11/12) (11%). Around half (46%) of those young people that reported drinking alcohol indicated they had been drunk at least once. The proportion was similar for boys (45%) and girls (47%).



[Access the survey here](#)

A health promotion approach for reducing youth exposure to alcoogenic environments



This brief was developed by the World Health Organization as part of its Snapshot Series on Alcohol Control Policies and Practice. It finds that alcoogenic environments promote the normalization of alcohol consumption, leading to adverse effects on brain development, decreased educational attainment, low mental wellbeing, increased risk for social problems such as violence and crime, earlier development of liver cirrhosis, higher likelihood of binge drinking, increased risk of alcohol use disorders, earlier onset and greater of alcohol consumption throughout the lifespan.

The brief also illustrates opportunities and challenges for reducing exposure to alcogenic environments and provides directions for a way forward.

[Access the research here](#)

Policy

Suicide prevention strategy for England: 2023 to 2028

The Department of Health and Social Care has published its Suicide Prevention Strategy for England. The strategy sets out the government's ambitions over the next five years to: reduce suicide rates; improve support for people who have self-harmed and improve support for people bereaved by suicide. The strategy was informed by the [mental health call for evidence](#) launched in 2022. It includes steps and actions from across government and a wide range of organisations to reduce the suicide rate over the next five years, with initial reductions in half this time.



[Access the Strategy here](#)

Parliamentary questions

Houses of the Oireachtas

Michael Healy-Rae TD

To ask the Minister for Finance if he will reduce alcohol excise by 7.5% in upcoming budgets (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter.



[Read the full response here](#)

Patrick Costello TD

To ask the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 430 of 11 September 2023, if he will consider extending the application of a reduced VAT rate to non-alcoholic beverages, regardless of the setting of sale (licensed premise, restaurant, supermarket or other retailer); and if he will make a statement on the matter.



[Read the full response here](#)

Neasa Hourigan TD

To ask the Minister for Health the data being collected on the effects of the marketing of zero-alcohol products with the same branding, logos and colours as their parent alcoholic counterparts; and if he will make a statement on the matter.



[Read the full response here](#)

Seanad Debates

Road Safety: Statements 27 September 2023

Jack Chambers TD updated Members on road safety and current progress against actions within the Government's road safety strategy for the period from 2021 to 2030. The debate provided an opportunity to hear Members' perspectives on road safety matters and concerns. Mr Chambers acknowledged the tragic loss of life on Ireland's roads in 2023. Regarding drink driving, Mr Chambers noted that analysis of coronial data found that 37% of driver fatalities that occurred between 2015 to 2019 had a positive toxicology for alcohol. Road Safety Authority surveys have also indicated that there has been an increase in the social acceptability of drink-driving. He noted that this is a worrying trend which must be reversed.



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Lisa Chambers TD suggested looking at practices in other European countries in terms of how they deal with speeding and speed offences. Ms Chambers said it was well documented that the use of mobile telephones and being under the influence of drugs or alcohol play a role in some of the accidents and fatalities.

[Read the full debate here](#)

Financial Resolutions 2023 - Financial Resolution No. 4: General 11 October 2023

Minister Naughton reported that in 2023 the Department of Health ensured that core funding for drug and alcohol task forces and section 39 organisations increased by €3.5 million. In addition, €1.5 million was provided for a drug and alcohol education and awareness programme. In 2024, the Department of Health will deliver ground-breaking services, which have never been provided to date. These will include dual diagnosis hubs that will support the recovery of young people with drug dependency and mental health issues and dedicated funding for services for people who embark on the road to recovery from drug addiction to support their integration into everyday life, for example, through housing and employment, education and other supports. In the past two years, funding for drug and alcohol services has increased by almost €10 million. In 2024, the State will invest in excess of €145 million on drug and alcohol addiction services.



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[Read the full debate here](#)

Crime and Policing: Motion 27 September 2023

During a Seanad Debate, Lynn Boylan TD said it was unacceptable that Dublin's inner city was



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without a local drug and alcohol task force for over a year. Ms Boylan said there needs to be a focus on diversionary processes and preventing people getting involved in criminality and leaving education early.

[Read the full debate here](#)

Consultations

Minimum Unit Pricing Consultation (Scottish Government)



A proposal to increase the Minimum Unit Price of alcohol by 15 pence per unit to 65 pence is included in a new [consultation on the future of the public health policy](#). Views are being sought on whether to continue the Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) legislation beyond the current term which ends next April, and the level at which it should be set. A Scottish Government report on the operation and effect of MUP in its first five years, an Interim Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment and a report on public attitudes to the policy have also been published. These papers assess the success of the measure so far and look at the future impact on health and industry sectors if it is continued and the potential effects of different minimum price levels. **Closing date for responses is Wednesday 22 November 2023.**

[Access the consultation here](#)

Updating labelling guidance for no and low-alcohol alternatives (UK Government)

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) in the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) is consulting on options for updating **guidance on low-alcohol descriptors**. The aim is to increase substitution of alcoholic drinks with 'alcohol free' or low-alcohol ('NoLo') alternatives among people who drink above low risk levels. **Closing date for responses is Thursday 23 November 2023.**



[Access the consultation here](#)

Substance Use Strategy Commissioning and Implementation Plan Consultation



The Public Health Agency (PHA) in partnership with the Strategic Planning & Performance Group (SPPG) are seeking views on the Substance Use Strategic Commissioning and Implementation Plan (the Plan) which will deliver the vision outlined in the Department of Health's recent Substance Use Strategy - **Making Life Better, Preventing Harm, Empowering Recovery**. PHA is seeking views on each of the eight Strategic Priority Areas that we have identified in the Plan; the recommended Commissioning Actions and the timescales for implementation. **Closing date for responses is Friday 24 November 2023.**

[Access the consultation here](#)

UK clinical guidelines for alcohol treatment (UK Government)

The Department of Health & Social Care is seeking views on the draft of the first ever UK Clinical Guidelines for Alcohol Treatment, and you are asked to review individual chapters from the draft guidelines document. Each chapter of the guidelines covers a different area, topic or setting that is important to supporting and treating people with alcohol problems. Each chapter summarises the main points on the topic, outlines good practice and guidance, and tells you how you can implement the guidance in your service. **Closing date for responses is Friday 8 December 2023.**



[Access the consultation here](#)

Innovation of the month

Alcohol consumption and suicidal behaviour



This factsheet, developed by the Trimbos Institute in the Netherlands, provides an overview of the recent literature on factors related to both alcohol consumption and suicidal behaviour. It contains tools for professionals for early detection, discussion and referral in cases of substance problems and suicidal behaviour.

[Access the factsheet here](#)

Events



Advancing alcohol research in Ireland conference

Following this recent conference event, the HRB has made the [slide](#) and [poster](#) presentations available.

Alcohol minimum unit pricing policy and its impact across the UK

21 Nov 2023, Virtual Event, Online, Time: 10:00 - 13:00

Colin Angus, a Senior Research Fellow and alcohol policy modeller in the Sheffield Alcohol Research Group at the University of Sheffield, will give an overview of the evidence on the impacts that Minimum Unit Pricing has had in Scotland, discuss the potential impacts it could have in England and Northern Ireland and consider how it might have influenced changes in drinking behaviours and alcohol harms since the start of the pandemic. Colin's work has played a key role in the development, introduction and evaluation of Minimum Unit Pricing in Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland as well as informing the development of low risk drinking guidelines in the UK and Australia and the recent changes to the UK alcohol duty system.

[Register here](#)

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