



# Reducing alcohol related harm in Ireland

Policy and legislation 1996-2020

Institute of  
Public Health



# Institute of Public Health

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# Key milestones in public health policy and legislation aimed at reducing alcohol related harms in Ireland

Alcohol is not an ordinary commodity and has significant public health implications in Ireland. As the amount of alcohol consumed in Ireland increased from the early 1990's, so too did the related harms, to individuals and families, and to communities and wider society. A range of policy and legislative instruments have been deployed to mitigate the impact of alcohol related harms.

This document summaries key milestones in policy and legalisation aimed at reducing alcohol related harms. It also provides an overview of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018.

**1996**

## **National Alcohol Policy**

Ireland's first national alcohol policy is developed to encourage moderation and reduce the prevalence of alcohol-related harms in Ireland. It recognised that the availability of alcohol in society has a much stronger influence on alcohol consumption than individually directed messages.

## **National Alcohol Policy Plan of Action**

Sets out the actions required from different partners in implementing the National Alcohol Policy.

**2000**

## **Commission on Liquor Licensing**

The Commission on Liquor Licensing was established in November 2000 to review Ireland's liquor licensing system. It produced several key reports and recommendations.

**2001**

## **National Drugs Strategy**

New strategy to significantly reduce the harm caused to individuals and society by drugs by focusing on supply reduction, prevention treatment, and research. Recognised the strong relationship between alcohol and drug misuse.

**2002**

### **Strategic Task Force on Alcohol – first report**

Government establishes the Strategic Task Force on Alcohol, as recommended by the Commission on Liquor Licensing. The Task Force delivers its first report in 2002 with a range of recommendations to regulate availability; reduce drink driving; protect children; provide information and services; research and monitor.

**2003**

### **Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003**

New laws which meant that underage individuals were not allowed in licensed premises after 9 pm. It also regulated the supply of alcohol to those intoxicated.

**2004**

### **Strategic Task Force on Alcohol – second report**

The Strategic Task Force on Alcohol delivers its second report, with a range of recommendations in line with emerging evidence from the World Health Organization.

**2006**

### **Road Safety Act 2006**

Among other measures the Act allowed the introduction of random breath testing of drivers to establish Blood Alcohol Content (BAC).

**2008**

### **Intoxicating Liquor Act 2008**

New laws introduced to restrict the sale of alcohol in off sales between the hours of 10.30 am to 10 pm, and the introduction of test purchasing among other measures.

**2009**

### **New National Drugs Strategy is launched**

A review of the National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008 is completed, and a new Strategy is implemented. It covers the period up to 2012, when a combined National Substance Misuse Strategy to cover both alcohol and drugs is launched.

**2010**

### **Road Traffic Act 2010**

Lowering of the Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) for those driving from 80mg to 50mg. Gardaí must also conduct breath tests when individuals involved in a collision are suspected of having consumed alcohol.

**2012**

## **Steering Group Report on a National Substance Misuse Strategy**

For the first time an integrated approach to substance misuse is envisaged, bringing together policy responses to alcohol use and misuse recommended by the Steering Group and to the misuse of other substances recommended in the National Drugs Strategy 2009–2016 to form a single, integrated policy response.

**2013**

## **Healthy Ireland**

Healthy Ireland, the national framework to improve the health and wellbeing of the population, is launched. One of its key targets is to reduce alcohol consumption across the population in order to reduce alcohol related harms.

**2014**

## **Road Traffic Act 2014**

Gardaí can take a specimen of blood from those involved in a collision and refusing to do becomes an offence.

**2015**

## **Public Health (Alcohol) Bill 2015**

Proposed new laws based on the recommendations of the Steering Group Report on a National Substance Misuse Strategy 2012 is first debated in the Oireachtas (Irish parliament) in December 2015. The bill covers five main areas. These include minimum unit pricing; health labelling of alcohol products; regulation of advertising and sponsorship of alcohol products; structural separation of alcohol products in mixed trading outlets; the regulation of the sale and supply of alcohol in certain circumstances.

**2017**

## **National Drugs and Alcohol Strategy**

Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery, the national strategy to address the harm caused by substance misuse, is launched. The strategy aims to create a healthier and safer Ireland, where public health and safety is protected and the harms caused to individuals, families and communities are reduced and every person affected by substance use is empowered to improve their health and wellbeing and quality of life. The strategy covers up to 2025.

**2018**

## **Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018**

The Bill completes all stages of parliamentary debate in October 2018 and becomes law. On 1st November 2018, the Minister for Health signs the Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 (Commencement) Order 2018, to commence 23 sections of the Public Health Alcohol Bill into operation.

# Ireland's public health legislative response to alcohol: summary of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018

The Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 is legislation that aims to reduce alcohol consumption and associated harms in Ireland. The proposed new legislation (Bill) was first debated in the Oireachtas (Irish parliament) in December 2015. It was subject to intense debate and lobbying throughout the legislative process.

The Bill finally completed all stages of parliamentary debate in October 2018, more than 1,000 days after the bill was first introduced to the parliament. Twenty-three sections of the Act were commenced in 2018 and are being implemented on a phased basis.

## Sections of the Act already commenced:

Three sections of the Act came into effect on 12 November 2018:

*Section 14:* alcohol advertising in or on public service vehicles, at public transport stops or stations and within 200 metres of a school, a crèche or a local authority playground is now prohibited.

*Section 20:* alcohol advertising in a cinema is now prohibited except around films with an 18 classification or in a licenced premises in a cinema.

*Section 17:* children's clothing that promotes alcohol is now prohibited.

## From 12 November 2020:

*Section 22:* In mixed retail outlets alcohol products and advertising are confined to one of the following: an area separated by a 1.2 metre high barrier, or units in which alcohol products are not visible up to 1.5 metres height, or up to three units that can be a maximum of 1 metre wide by 2.2 metres high. Alcohol products can also be contained, but not be visible, in a unit behind the counter.

## From 12 November 2021:

*Section 15:* A prohibition on alcohol advertising in a sports area during a sporting event, at events aimed at children or at events in which most participants, or competitors, are children.

*Section 16:* Alcohol sponsorship of events aimed at children, events which most participants, or competitors, are children and events involving driving or racing motor vehicles is prohibited.

**Regulation under Section 23:**

The Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 (Sale and Supply of Alcohol Products) Regulations were signed into law on 9 January 2020. These regulations, which come into effect from 11 January 2021, will:

- prohibit the sale of alcohol at a reduced price or free of charge on the basis of the purchase of another product or service.
- prohibit the awarding of loyalty card points for alcohol purchases.
- prohibit short term (3 days or less) price promotions on alcohol products.

**Other Sections which have not yet been commenced (come into force) include:**

*Section 11:* Minimum Unit Price (MUP).

*Section 12:* Labelling of alcohol products to inform the public of the danger of alcohol consumption.

*Section 19:* Broadcast watershed on advertisement for alcohol products on TV between 3.00 am and 9.00 pm, and on radio between midnight and 10.00 am, and 3.00 pm and midnight.

To find out more about the Act visit [www.irishstatutebook.ie](http://www.irishstatutebook.ie) and search 'Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018'.



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