



The North South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group 2013-2024

August 2025

The North South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group 2013-2024

Published 2025

To be cited as: Carlin, E. and Purdy J. (2025) The North South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group 2013-2024. Institute of Public Health: Dublin and Belfast

Download available at www.publichealth.ie

The Institute of Public Health has produced this document as a resource for public health on the island of Ireland. It may be freely reproduced with acknowledgement but is not for resale or for use in conjunction with commercial purposes.

Acknowledgements

The Institute of Public Health wishes to thank Dr Eric Carlin, Dr Joanna Purdy and Tara Burke for compiling this report.

ISBN: 978-1-913829-48-3
DOI: 10.14655/11971-1084925

Table of Contents

Foreword	4
1. Introduction	5
Strategic objectives of the NSAPAG	5
2. Context	6
Ireland	6
Northern Ireland	7
3. Key Activities	9
Objective 1: Provide a forum for discussion on alcohol issues	10
Objective 2: Strengthen all-island alcohol initiatives	12
Objective 3: Explore opportunities for North South cooperation on alcohol	14
Objective 4: Identify policy solutions and other measures to improve the legislative and regulatory arrangements impacting on supply and use of alcohol	16
Objective 5: Share information on evidence and research	18
Objective 6: Develop pathways for improved policy making and action	20
4. Appendices	21
Appendix one: Timeline and highlights of NSAPAG meetings	21
Appendix two: Timeline and highlights of NSAPAG Knowledge Exchange Seminars	26
Appendix three: NSAPAG Newsletters	27
Appendix four: Some additional NSAPAG resources	30
Appendix five: Acknowledgements	31
5. References	33

Foreword

For more than a decade, the North South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group (NSAPAG) has fostered collaboration on alcohol policy and public health on the island of Ireland. The Group has played a significant role in supporting progress in policy alignment and evidence-based initiatives to reduce alcohol-related harms.

As outgoing Chair, I would like to thank the Chief Medical Officers in both jurisdictions for their foresight in establishing this Group in 2013. Since then, substantial progress on addressing alcohol harm has been made across the island.

In addition to my predecessors in this role, I wish to thank the many people who have contributed to the work of the NSAPAG.

This report highlights the NSAPAG's achievements and celebrates the value of North South cooperation in facing shared and sustained challenges.



Chair
North South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group (NSAPAG)



1. Introduction

In February 2013, the Chief Medical Officers of Ireland and Northern Ireland convened a meeting to explore the establishment of a forum, which could contribute to reducing alcohol-related harm on the island of Ireland. This meeting led to the creation of the North South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group (NSAPAG), designed to foster cooperation, strengthen policy frameworks, and reduce alcohol-related harm.

Strategic objectives of the NSAPAG

The group's objectives were defined as follows:

1. **Provide a forum** for discussion on alcohol issues.
2. **Strengthen all-island alcohol initiatives** to maximise impact.
3. **Explore opportunities** for North-South cooperation on alcohol policy.
4. **Identify policy solutions** to improve legislative and regulatory arrangements.
5. **Share evidence** and research to inform decision-making.
6. **Develop pathways** for improved policy-making and action.

It was agreed that membership of the NSAPAG would be by invitation from the Institute of Public Health which also assumed the role of secretariat. The forum was established for an initial period of three years and was renewed again in 2016, 2019, and 2022. The Departments of Health (Ireland and Northern Ireland) have regularly reported the NSAPAG's activities to the North South Ministerial Council.

The Institute of Public Health has served as Secretariat and Chair of the NSAPAG since its inception. The following agencies have been partners in establishing and implementing a strategy for the NSAPAG:

- **Statutory agencies:** Public Health Agency (PHA), Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Health Research Board
- **Government Departments (Ireland):** Department of Health and Department of Justice.
- **Government Departments (Northern Ireland):** Department of Health, Department for Communities and Department of Justice.
- **Academia:** Trinity College Dublin, Ulster University and Queen's University Belfast.
- **NGOs:** Alcohol Action Ireland, ARC Healthy Living Centre, Cooperation and Working Together (CAWT) and the Forum for Action on Substance Abuse (FASA, up to 2016).
- **Professional bodies:** Royal College of Physicians in Ireland (RCPI).

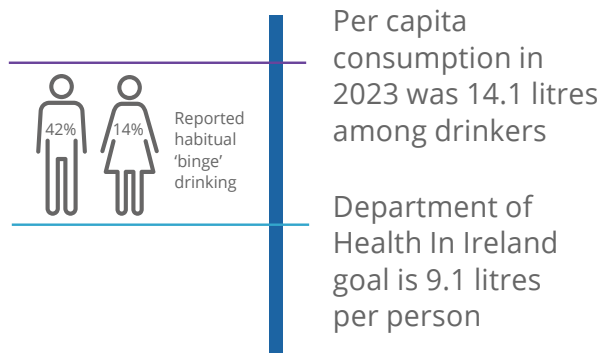
ⁱ Re-endorsed June 2016, May 2019 and May 2022.

2. Context

Alcohol-related harm is a critical public health issue on the island of Ireland. Both jurisdictions experience high levels of alcohol consumption, with significant impacts on health services, families, and communities. Research highlights persistent challenges, such as alcohol's role in mental health disorders, chronic illnesses, and societal harms, including crime and domestic violence.

Ireland

Alcohol consumption in Ireland among those aged 15 and over declined from 10.5 litres per capita in 2013 to 9.9 litres in 2023ⁱ. Almost one in three adults report that they have not consumed alcohol in the last year². Among drinkers, per capita consumption in 2023 was 14.1 litres per person, considerably more than the Department of Health's stated aim to reduce per capita alcohol consumption in Ireland to 9.1 litres³. Health risks are increased by habitual 'binge' drinking on a 'typical' drinking occasionⁱⁱ, with men (42%) reporting this far more often than women (14%).⁴



In Ireland, there was some fluctuation in alcohol-attributable deathsⁱⁱⁱ between 2013 and 2017, with 1,055 deaths recorded in 2013, increasing to 1,182 in 2016 and then dropping to 1,094 in 2017. The number of alcohol-attributable deaths in 2017 equated to 3.6% of total Deaths.⁵



ⁱⁱ [According to the Health Service Executive, binge drinking is considered to be 6 or more drinks in one sitting. This increases the risk of serious health problems like cancer, liver disease and high blood pressure. In Ireland a standard drink contains 10g of alcohol; in the UK, a unit of alcohol contains 8g of alcohol.](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Alcohol-attributable deaths are those that are wholly attributable to alcohol. The National Drug-Related Deaths Index (NDRDI) also collects data about deaths among those with a history of alcohol dependency regardless of their cause of death*. The NDRDI does not record deaths that are partially attributable to alcohol, and so the data presented are likely to be an underestimate of alcohol-related mortality in Ireland. These data are not comparable to Northern Ireland.

* The registration criteria for the NDRDI can be found [here](#).

Northern Ireland

In 2013-14, more than three quarters (77%) of survey respondents in Northern Ireland reported currently drinking alcohol. This figure had increased slightly to 78% in 2023-24, with more men (81%) than women (76%) reporting as current consumers.

Of those who reported drinking alcohol in the last week in 2019-20, more than half (54%) reported drinking more than five units on one day, with 13% reporting drinking more than 14 units on a single day.⁶

Alcohol-specific deaths^{iv} have increased in Northern Ireland from 206 in 2013 to 341 in 2023, with the latter equating to 2.0% of total deaths.⁷

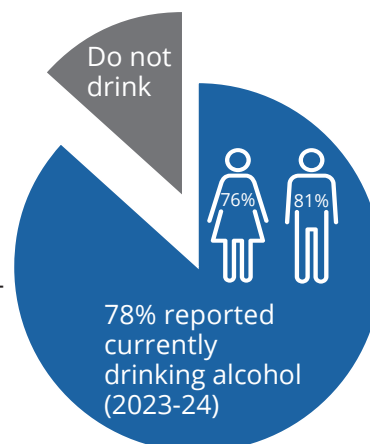
Of those who reported drinking alcohol in the last week in 2019-20



54% reported drinking more than five units on one day



13% reported drinking more than fourteen units on one day



Broad spectrum of alcohol-related harms

Levels of alcohol consumption and related harm remain high in both Ireland and Northern Ireland. In addition to the significant impact on mortality, alcohol is associated with liver disease, heart disease and cancer and can be a contributory factor in mental ill-health.

Alcohol-related harms are wide-ranging and include, and are not limited to:

- injury and death as a result of drink driving
- violence and crime
- physical and emotional harm as well as neglect among children living with parental alcohol misuse
- accidents and poisonings
- reduced productivity and/or absenteeism in the workplace
- other substance use or addictions (such as tobacco, polydrug use and gambling)
- financial and emotional strain on families and relationships.

^{iv} [According to the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Alcohol-specific deaths include conditions known to be exclusively caused by alcohol \(that is, wholly attributable causes\) and exclude conditions where only a proportion of the deaths are caused by alcohol \(that is, partially attributable causes\).](#)

Challenges

The fact that across the island of Ireland there is a deep-rooted cultural acceptance of alcohol as an essential part of social life can make it difficult to build public support for the implementation of evidence-based policies.

A geographical border offers no protection against disease or ill-health and people on both sides face similar health risks related to alcohol consumption. Challenges in implementing consistent uniform measures across the two jurisdictions have been exacerbated by external circumstances, including:

- The withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union - from the UK referendum in 2016 to enactment in 2020
- Suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly – from 2017- 2020 and again from 2022 - 2024^v
- Various changes of governments in Ireland and the United Kingdom
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe has highlighted that,

“Interference by economic operators in alcohol production and trade has been identified as one of the most serious barriers to implementation of alcohol policies by the Member States of the WHO European Region”.⁸

The NSAPAG has, as part of its remit, highlighted actions by economic operators in Ireland that have undermined progress with evidence-based measures such as pricing policies and advertising restrictions and actions to regulate digital marketing and online sales. The NSAPAG has also specifically drawn attention to the sustained opposition that parts of the alcohol industry have mounted to impede the implementation of the evidence-based measures of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act (Ireland).

^v For example, [actions](#) to take forward potential implementation of MUP in Northern Ireland were suspended when the Northern Ireland Assembly was dissolved in 2022.

3. Key Activities

An early report on the work and activities of the NSAPAG noted:⁹

“Many benefits can be accrued through enhanced North South cooperation on alcohol policies and programmes including:

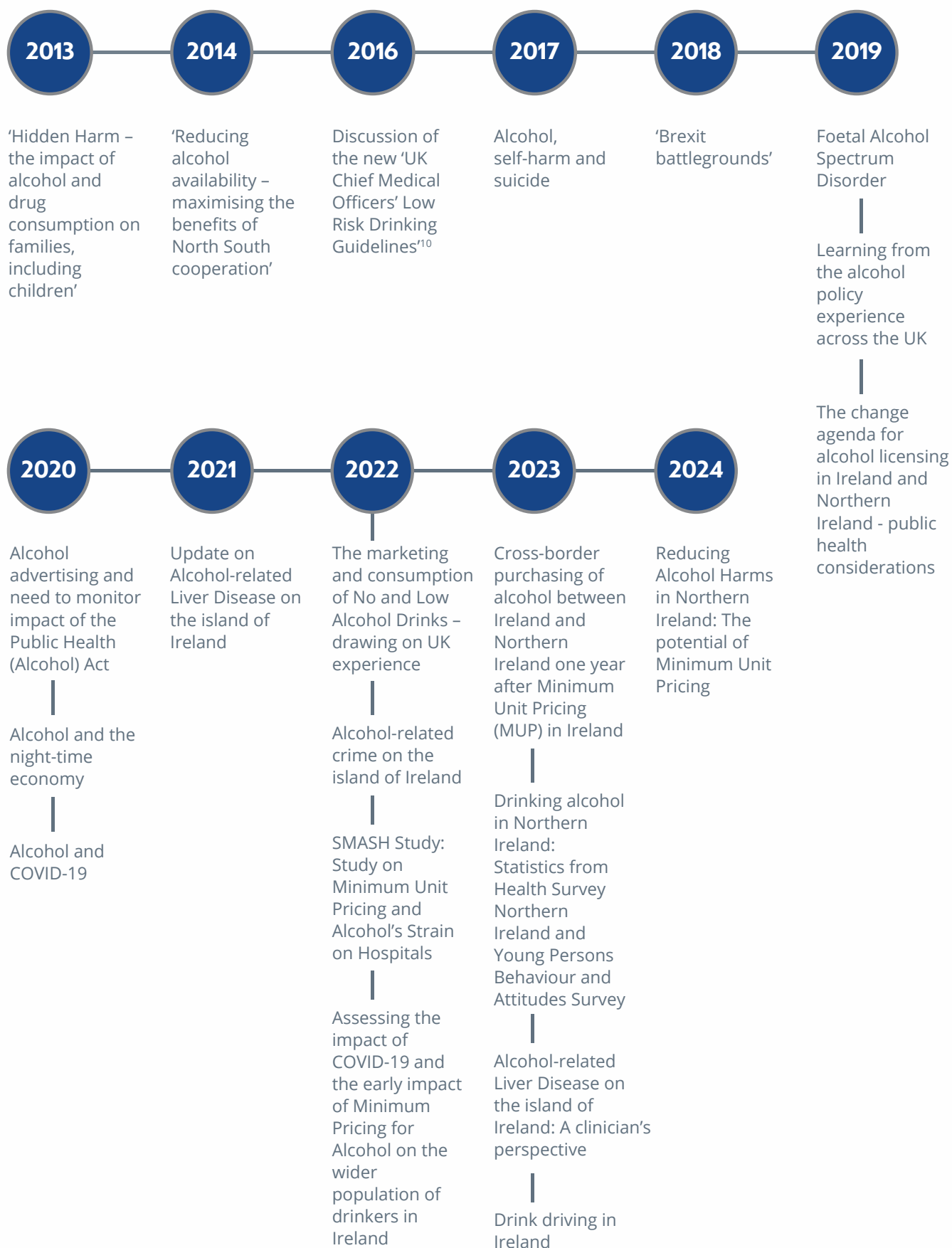
- Mutually beneficial learning through sharing of ideas and experience
- The development of key relationships for sharing knowledge and access to knowledge networks
- Development of aligned cross-jurisdictional messages to influence policy in favour of health and the reduction of alcohol-related harm on the island
- Economies of scale in the coordinated roll-out of programmes, evaluations and media campaigns
- Harmonised approaches to cross-border issues such as alcohol pricing and legislation
- Opportunities to support the implementation of successful programmes from one jurisdiction in another and compare different policy approaches
- Enhanced capacity to participate in wider European and global work on alcohol including joint cross-jurisdictional research applications.”

The activities that have been carried out by the NSAPAG since 2013 have led to substantial achievements in many of these areas. Examples are outlined below, in the context of the NSAPAG’s strategic objectives.



Objective 1: Provide a forum for discussion on alcohol issues

The NSAPAG has provided a forum for knowledge exchange and discussion about many issues related to alcohol and public health, with the following being some of the highlights:



The NSAPAG has kept a close watching brief on the impact of political developments, including the UK's withdrawal from the European Union, as well as other political developments.

In 2017, the NSAPAG noted that the UK's withdrawal from the European Union was likely to impact on the following issues:

- Cross-border trade
- Potential variations in alcohol duty
- Criminality
- Cross-border healthcare and treatment services (where there had been up until then good cooperation between the two jurisdictions)
- Divergence in relation to EU rules on issues such as alcohol labelling, 'duty free' products and advertising.

Responding to the UK's withdrawal from the European Union

In 2018, the NSAPAG considered the report, 'Brexit battlegrounds'¹¹ by the Institute of Alcohol Studies, which includes often oppositional policy perspectives from public health groups and the alcohol industry, as illustrated in the table below.



Proposals from public health groups to protect public health	Proposals from the alcohol industry related to the UK's withdrawal from the European Union
Explicit protection for public health in future trade and investment agreements to ensure industry cannot legally challenge regulations	Maintain the status quo and minimise disruption of the alcohol industry
Rationalisation of the duty system to ensure stronger alcohol products are taxed at a higher rate	Calls for lower tax on lower strength alcohol products and efforts to maintain current free trade guarantees
Labelling requirements for alcohol products to display nutritional information and health warnings	Encouragement of tax competition and to weaken regulation (including labelling requirements) by including them among non-tariff barriers to trade
Stronger restrictions on marketing	Attempts to increase industry influence over policy through participation in trade discussions, and developing 'model agreements' for the government to adopt wholesale
	Attempts to increase access to emerging markets with the greatest prospects for aggressive growth

Objective 2: Strengthen all-island alcohol initiatives

In 2014, the NSAPAG¹² proposed measures that included gathering and making better use of data and research on an all-island basis to support evidence for policy innovation in a number of areas, including actions to reduce availability of alcohol in retail contexts^{vi}. At the same time, the NSAPAG also proposed introducing more formal links with similar fora in England, Scotland and Wales with a view to the development of coordinated approaches to issues of alcohol availability not just between UK jurisdictions but also between the island of Ireland and that of Great Britain.

Alcohol-related crime on the island of Ireland

In 2022, a seminar led by IPH compared data from pre-pandemic and pandemic years, discussing:



- Basic data on patterns of alcohol-related crime
- Patterns in pre-pandemic and pandemic time periods
- Potential evidence-based policy responses – across sectors including criminal justice, alcohol licensing, public health, occupational health and health services, traffic and community policing, night-time economy and emergency services
- How trends are interpreted, the appropriateness of information systems to measure alcohol-related crime and potential data and research priorities on the island of Ireland.

The following observations constituted some of the key discussion points:

- Around one in six to one in five crimes in Northern Ireland are considered to be alcohol-related.
- The relative contribution of alcohol-related crimes declined in the pandemic years, but it is possible that pub and nightclub closures may have caused a shift to at-home drinking, moving some alcohol-related crime from public places to the home environment.
- There appears to be no formalised reporting mechanism in terms of alcohol within domestic abuse incidents in either jurisdiction.
- The differences in Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) limits between the two jurisdictions means that data are not directly comparable. In 2020, the number of people detected by police as driving whilst intoxicated remained unchanged in both Ireland and Northern Ireland compared to previous years.
- In both jurisdictions, the data on drink driving has been combined with data on drug driving. Separating these would provide useful insight into the individual trends around drink driving and drug driving.

Actions that might reduce alcohol-related crime could include:

- Minimum unit pricing
- More licensing restrictions
- Harmonising of BAC levels across the jurisdictions and new road safety strategies
- More comprehensive data mapping.

^{vi} [*WHO has identified as a “Best Buy” cost-effective measure to reduce harm from alcohol to “Enact and enforce restrictions on the physical availability of retailed alcohol \(via reduced hours of sale\)”.*](#)

Reducing alcohol availability – maximising the benefits of North South cooperation

In July 2014, the NSAPAG published the paper 'Reducing alcohol availability – maximising the benefits of North South cooperation'. The findings of this paper were presented to the North South Ministerial Council in April 2014, and endorsed by the then Ministers for Health, Minister Edwin Poots and Minister James Reilly. This paper has been viewed by key stakeholders as an informative and authoritative document.



Emerging from this paper was the proposal to undertake research on making better use of data on premises licensed to sell alcohol in both jurisdictions. It was determined that an all-island information resource based on mapping geo-coded alcohol retail outlets would be beneficial. This research then commenced in both Ireland and Northern Ireland. Supporting the research, at an NSAPAG Knowledge Exchange Forum on 30 November 2015, academics and policy makers from the UK shared their experience of using liquor licensing data to map alcohol outlet density and the association with alcohol-related harms and inequalities.

Objective 3: Explore opportunities for North South cooperation on alcohol

Throughout its history, the NSAPAG has taken advantage of opportunities to learn from research, as well as innovative policy developments from the UK as well as in Ireland.

Learning from the UK experience

In 2019, Professor Ian Gilmore, Chair of the UK Alcohol Health Alliance, joined the NSAPAG to facilitate a wide-ranging discussion of policy experiences, including:

- Advocacy activities, including through the Alcohol Health Alliance and challenges in overcoming alcohol industry interference
- Successful collaboration across the four UK nations to achieve new low risk drinking guidelines, published in 2016
- Challenges and successes in implementing pricing policies, including MUP
- Experiences and challenges of treatment and addiction services
- Progress on public health licensing in the four UK nations
- The work of the then forthcoming Commission on Alcohol Harm: An Inquiry into the Effects of Alcohol on Society.



North South Hidden Harm Group

In 2013, a review of Northern Ireland's Hidden Harm strategy^{vii} provided an opportunity for services in Northern Ireland and Ireland to establish an all-island, practice-orientated action group on Hidden Harm. A North South Hidden Harm Group was established, facilitated by Co-operation and Working Together (CAWT), and reported into the NSAPAG. The overarching aims of the North South Hidden Harm Group, which met for two to three years, were as follows:

- Adopt an inter-sectoral response to Hidden Harm on an all-island basis.
- Establish an all-island practice-oriented working group on Hidden Harm aimed at the development of an all-island framework on Hidden Harm, thereby improving outcomes for children living with parental substance misuse.



^{vii} [*The 'Regional Joint Service Agreement – Hidden Harm', published by the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency laid out a protocol to support, "the development of effective interagency collaboration to ensure the well-being of children affected by parental substance misuse."*](#)

Among its activities, the Hidden Harm group delivered training for practitioners on issues such as the impacts of childhood trauma. Its members also linked with Queen's University Belfast to establish a portal regarding best practice evidence-based interventions for families that are vulnerable due to alcohol and/or drug use. Under the auspices of the NSAPAG, Cooperation and Working Together (CAWT) and the Health Service Executive worked together on an information leaflet to support teachers, general practitioners, youth workers, sports coaches, childcare and family support services to support young people affected by parental 'problem alcohol and other drug use'.¹³

Following on from this earlier work, health bodies across the island of Ireland continue to meet informally to exchange information on Hidden Harm.

Objective 4: Identify policy solutions and other measures to improve the legislative and regulatory arrangements impacting on supply and use of alcohol

Over several years, the NSAPAG has been active in providing evidence and facilitating discussion to support the implementation of the innovative wide-ranging Public Health (Alcohol) Act, which was signed into law in Ireland on 17 October 2018, as well as to support it to be impactful. The first three substantive elements of the Act came into effect on 12 November 2019. These included restrictions on:

- 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
- Alcohol advertising in a cinema except for films with an 18 classification or in a licensed premise in a cinema
- Children's clothing that promotes alcohol.

Minimum Unit Pricing on the island of Ireland

A seminar on 18 May 2023 considered research conducted by Dr Nathan Critchlow, University of Stirling. The research explored whether cross-border alcohol purchasing, between Ireland and Northern Ireland, had changed since the introduction of Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) in Ireland. In the year after MUP was introduced, the research found an increase in the number of people who travelled to Northern Ireland to purchase alcohol, as well as an increase in reporting cheaper price as a motivator. However, it is likely that the number of people undertaking such journeys was small.



Following the 2023 discussions, on 26 September 2024, the NSAPAG hosted a seminar 'Reducing Alcohol Harms in Northern Ireland: The potential of Minimum Unit Pricing' in the Northern Ireland Parliament Buildings in Belfast. Policymakers, academics, public health experts and community health advocates gathered to discuss the potential of MUP to tackle alcohol-related harm and health inequalities in Northern Ireland.

As an action-focussed seminar, with strong consensus that introducing MUP in Northern Ireland would be beneficial, policymakers were advised that the following key issues would need to be considered in planning for its implementation:

- MUP should be considered as one of a portfolio of cost-effective alcohol policy options. Its implementation should be considered as complementary and synergetic with other necessary and evidence-based public health actions, including taxation as well as measures to provide support for dependent drinkers to have the possibility of recovery.

- An assessment of the appropriate rate to have the most cost-effective impact should be made. This should be based on the best available evidence from Northern Ireland, as well as paying attention to other jurisdictions where MUP has already been implemented.
- In order to maintain the policy's effectiveness, included in the regulation to implement MUP there should be an automatic mechanism to review its level, linked to inflation rates.
- There should be a rigorous and transparent evaluation process to understand the impact of the implementation of MUP, as has happened in Scotland.
- A levy on alcohol producers and retailers should be considered, so that any additional revenue they might make from the policy can be directed into evidence-based public health measures to reduce harms due to alcohol consumption and to support recovery.
- Public health messaging should be carefully designed, highlighting evidence, so as to gain and maintain public support for MUP, as well as to counter opposition to the measure.
- Alongside MUP, there should be consideration of broader public health campaigns to raise awareness of alcohol harms, including alcohol's links to cancer risks, and engaging actively with communities, including people with lived experience.

Following the seminar, Northern Ireland's Health Minister Mike Nesbitt welcomed these discussions and on 17 October 2024, he informed the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Health that he had asked officials to progress work on the introduction of Minimum Unit Pricing for alcohol regulations.

Objective 5: Share information on evidence and research

In May 2019, the NSAPAG launched the [All-Island Alcohol Data Directory](#), which signposts users to reports and publications from statutory and public agencies. Resources included data from statutory sources in Ireland and Northern Ireland on alcohol-related road traffic accidents and deaths, self-harms, sexual harms, and county profiles for Ireland as well as EU and global comparison data.

Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)

The NSAPAG held an Evidence Briefing on Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder on 14 November 2019. The guest speakers included Dr Mary O'Mahony (Health Service Executive) and Dr Paul Darragh (British Medical Association).



Ireland features among the five countries with the highest prevalence of FASD.

The seminar included the following insights:

- Four in five of first pregnancies are exposed to alcohol; nearly half (45%) are exposed at high-risk levels
- Two in five pregnancies are unplanned, increasing the chance they will be exposed to alcohol
- Pregnant women do not consistently receive timely maternity care or support for their alcohol and drug issues
- Health professionals do not consistently provide information on the risks of drinking during pregnancy or routinely screen for alcohol issues
- Most clinicians lack the capability to diagnose FASD
- Families of people with FASD struggle to access appropriate support and report a lack of understanding from services, professionals and even other family members.

In response, effective interventions in the prevention of FASD include:

- Screening and brief intervention for alcohol – needed in pregnancy
- Parent and child assistance programmes – adapting existing resources
- Consistent messaging.

Since January 2016, the advice of the four UK Chief Medical Officers is that if you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, the safest approach is not to drink alcohol at all, and that to do so during pregnancy can lead to the risk of long-term harm for the baby.

Alcohol and COVID-19

In 2020, responding to the public health emergency of COVID-19, the NSAPAG discussed the issue and also published a briefing for policymakers covering the following themes:



- Alcohol and viral transmission
- Alcohol and COVID-19 disease
- Drinking patterns during the pandemic
- Alcohol-related harms during the pandemic
- Alcohol retail and industry activity during the pandemic.

Key points from the discussions/briefings included:

- There is some evidence that online alcohol advertising has dramatically increased.
- There has also been a growth in special offers at points of sale and online, including bulk purchase and price-based promotions.
- There have been increases in take-away alcohol and alcohol home delivery, both separate and linked to food takeaway and delivery.
- Parts of the alcohol industry has engaged in lobbying and media engagement with views opposing most public health agencies on COVID-19 restrictions, including timing/conditions for opening licensed premises.
- At the same time as working to influence policymakers to support their interests, the alcohol industry has established new corporate social responsibility initiatives, for example, providing hand sanitiser and/or Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), such as face masks.

Objective 6: Develop pathways for improved policy making and action

The NSAPAG has continually discussed a range of policy issues across the island of Ireland, referencing the Programme for Government in Ireland ('Our Shared Future') and Northern Ireland ('New Decade, New Approach'). This included a webinar, held on 20 December 2020, that focussed on public health considerations related to alcohol and the night-time economy. Discussions have also focused on progress with the implementation of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act and its implications across the whole island.

Alcohol-related Liver Disease (ARLD) on the island of Ireland

On 27 May 2021, Dr Noel Sharkey and IPH provided an update on Alcohol-related Liver Disease (ARLD) on the island of Ireland. The following recommendations were made:



- Increase public awareness of the increasing burden of ARLD on the island of Ireland and the clinical realities of the condition such as late presentation and high premature mortality with loss of working years.
- Introduce minimum unit pricing in both jurisdictions as a matter of priority alongside efforts to reduce the negative impact of marketing and promotion of alcohol on vulnerable groups.
- Engage with administrative systems personnel in both jurisdictions to improve the accuracy of liver disease classification to give the full extent of the disease burden.
- Increase provision of integrated 24/7 alcohol care teams within hospitals alongside increasing the provision of alcohol detoxification services in communities.
- Improve efforts to detect liver disease early by improving alcohol screening and targeting liver health checks in 'at risk groups'^{vii} in primary care.
- Undertake efforts to increase the number of specialists in alcohol-related liver disease to enable the provision of specialised outpatient clinics and specialist inpatient care.
- Include hospital activity data for alcohol specific conditions such as ARLD in the publication of periodic alcohol statistical reports.

At a follow-up session on 16 November 2023, Dr John Ryan and Dr Roger McCorry provided the perspectives of two clinicians in Northern Ireland and Ireland on the continuing public health problem of liver disease acquired due to alcohol consumption.¹⁴

Within these discussions, as well as needing to implement all of the components of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act, it was made clear that there is a need for integrated services for Alcohol-Related Liver Disease. Structurally, it was argued that there is a need for a cohesive prevention strategy, a capped minimum of 10% of health spend to be focussed on mental health and addictions and a broader anti-poverty strategy to reduce the wide health impacts of alcohol between rich and poor.

^{vii} [*As defined by the British Liver Trust*](#)

4. Appendices

Appendix one: Timeline and highlights of NSAPAG meetings

Date	Location	Some of the highlights
5 February 2013	Dundalk	Inaugural meeting and discussion of proposed Terms of Reference.
18 June 2013	Dundalk	Presentation, <i>Hidden Harm</i> ¹⁵ <i>ten years on: progress and challenges</i> by Michael Murphy, University of Salford. Discussions on alcohol outlet density, as well as on relationships with the alcohol industry.
19 November 2013	Dundalk	Briefing paper, <i>Reducing alcohol-related harm by addressing availability – Maximising benefits from North South cooperation</i> ¹⁶ , prepared for the North South Ministerial Council and submitted to the CMOs for presentation at the next Council meeting in March 2014.
13 May 2014	Dundalk	Presentation by Dr Paul Darragh (Chair, British Medical Association (BMA) Northern Ireland Council) on the BMA and their publication record in terms to alcohol reports and policy briefings for the Northern Ireland Assembly. Discussions on alcohol outlet density mapping and Hidden Harm projects.
13 November 2014	Dundalk	Discussions on alcohol outlet density mapping and Hidden Harm projects, Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) and discussions with the alcohol industry.
14 May 2015	Dundalk	Discussion of research proposal by Dr Katherine Higgins, Queen's University Belfast, on <i>Evaluating Ireland's Strategy to Control Alcohol Misuse</i> . Discussions on alcohol marketing and alcohol outlet density mapping project.
12 November 2015	Dundalk	Discussions on MUP, the progress of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill and the Hidden Harm project.
17 June 2016	Dundalk	Reaffirmation of Terms of Reference. Discussions of policy challenges and opportunities, including the <i>Public Health (Alcohol) Bill</i> , MUP, licensing, drink driving and improving health within the criminal justice system.

22 November 2016	Dundalk	Discussions of policy challenges and opportunities, including licensing, MUP, the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill and the new <i>UK Chief Medical Officers' Low Risk Drinking Guidelines</i> . ¹⁷
22 June 2017	Dundalk	Discussions of policy challenges and opportunities, including Healthy Cities, the <i>Public Health (Alcohol) Bill</i> , MUP, the UK Alcohol Structures consultation and NSAPAG communications.
23 November 2017	Dundalk	Discussions of policy challenges and opportunities, including the <i>New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs</i> (Northern Ireland), the <i>Public Health (Alcohol) Bill</i> , MUP and the implications of the UK's exit from the European Union.
21 June 2018	Dundalk	Discussions of policy challenges and opportunities, including the <i>Public Health (Alcohol) Bill</i> , MUP, now in place in Scotland, the <i>New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs</i> (Northern Ireland), the <i>National Drugs Strategy</i> (Ireland) and the Health and Safety Executive <i>Ask about Alcohol</i> campaign. Substantial discussion of the implications of the UK's exit from the European Union led by the Institute of Alcohol Studies.
30 November 2018	Dundalk	Discussions of policy challenges and opportunities, including the <i>Public Health (Alcohol) Bill</i> , the <i>Intoxicating Liquor (Breweries and Distilleries) Act 2018</i> , MUP, the UK's exit from the European Union, policing and the new national drugs strategy, <i>Reducing Harm Supporting Recovery: A health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland (2017-2025)</i> . ¹⁸
22 May 2019	Belfast	Reaffirmation of Terms of Reference. Discussions of policy challenges and opportunities, including the <i>Public Health (Alcohol) Bill</i> , the UK's exit from the European Union, licensing, treatment services and the Global Alcohol Policy Alliance Conference, due to be held in Dublin in March 2020.

14 November 2019	Dundalk	Presentation from Sir Professor Sir Ian Gilmore, Chair of the UK Alcohol Health Alliance, on developments in alcohol policy and the low risk drinking guidelines in the UK. Discussions of policy challenges and opportunities, including the <i>Public Health (Alcohol) Act (2018)</i> , the UK's exit from the European Union, sale and supply of alcoholic drinks at 'special events' in Northern Ireland, licensing and clinical guidelines.
17 September 2020	Online meeting	Due to COVID-19, this meeting was held online via Zoom. Dr Nathan Critchlow (University of Stirling) presented baseline data collected in Ireland on awareness and exposure to alcohol advertising prior to the implementation of the <i>Public Health (Alcohol) Act (2018)</i> . Dr Helen McAvoy from the Institute of Public Health delivered a presentation on Alcohol and COVID-19.
27 May 2021	Online meeting	Presentation by Dr Noel Sharkey (Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast) on <i>Alcohol-related Liver Disease on the island of Ireland</i> . Discussions of policy challenges and opportunities, including the <i>Public Health (Alcohol) Act (2018)</i> , MUP, EU and UK policy development, licensing, alcohol and COVID-19 and the new UK-Ireland Alcohol Research Network (ACORN).
25 November 2021	Online meeting	Presentation by Anne Doyle (Health Research Board) on <i>National Drug and Alcohol Survey 2019/20</i> . Discussions of policy challenges and opportunities, including the <i>Public Health (Alcohol) Act (2018)</i> , MUP, Mid-Term Review of <i>Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery and Strategic Priorities 2021-2025</i> , <i>Night-time Economy Taskforce Report</i> , <i>Sale of Alcohol Bill</i> , <i>Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill</i> , <i>Preventing Harm, Empowering Recovery - A Strategic Framework to Tackle the Harm from Substance Use (2021-31) (Northern Ireland)</i> , <i>Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland)</i> and the <i>Health Survey Northern Ireland</i> .

24 May 2022	Dundalk	Reaffirmation of Terms of Reference. Presentation by Dr Emily Nicholls (University of York) on <i>The Marketing and Consumption of No and Low Alcohol Drinks in the UK</i> . Discussions of policy challenges and opportunities, including the <i>Public Health (Alcohol) Act (2018)</i> , <i>Sale of Alcohol Bill</i> , the UK's exit from the European Union, drink driving, licensing and alcohol-related crime during the COVID-19 pandemic.
22 November 2022	Dundalk	Presentations by Professor Katy Holloway (University of South Wales) and Professor Wulf Livingston (Glyndwr University, Wrexham) on <i>Assessing Impact of COVID-19 and the Early Impact of Minimum Pricing for Alcohol on the Wider Population of Drinkers</i> and from Dr Tobias Maharaj (Clinical Research Fellow, Hepatology Unit Beaumont Hospital Dublin, Honorary Clinical Lecturer, RCSI) on <i>Minimum Unit Pricing and alcohol's strain on hospitals (SMASH Study)</i> . Discussions of policy challenges and opportunities, including the <i>Public Health (Alcohol) Act (2018)</i> , <i>Preventing Harm, Empowering Recovery - Substance Use Strategy</i> , licensing, treatment availability and the <i>Sale of Alcohol Bill</i> .
18 May 2023	Dundalk	Presentation by Dr Nathan Critchlow (University of Stirling) - <i>Cross-border purchasing of alcohol between Ireland and Northern Ireland one year after minimum unit pricing (MUP) in Ireland</i> . Presentations by Bill Stewart (Department of Health) and Anne Doyle (Health Research Board) - <i>Alcohol consumption in Ireland and Northern Ireland – current patterns and trends</i> . Discussions of policy challenges and opportunities, including the <i>Public Health (Alcohol) Act (2018)</i> , <i>Preventing Harm, Empowering Recovery - Substance Use Strategy</i> , licensing, the <i>Sale of Alcohol Bill</i> .

16 November 2023	Dublin	Presentation by Helen Kearns (Medical Bureau of Road Safety, University College, Dublin) on drink driving in Ireland. Discussions of policy challenges and opportunities, including the <i>Public Health (Alcohol) Act (2018)</i> , <i>Preventing Harm, Empowering Recovery - Substance Use Strategy</i> , licensing, the <i>Sale of Alcohol Bill</i> , MUP and the content of forthcoming Healthy Ireland Survey and Health Survey Northern Ireland.
7 May 2024	Dundalk	Presentation by Professor Des O'Neill (Tallaght Hospital and Trinity College Dublin) on <i>Alcohol Interlock Systems</i> . Discussions of policy challenges and opportunities, including continuing the implementation of the <i>Public Health (Alcohol) Act (2018)</i> , <i>Preventing Harm, Empowering Recovery - Substance Use Strategy</i> , licensing and MUP.
November 2024	Dundalk	Presentation by Anne Doyle on the <i>Health Research Board Alcohol Statistics Dashboard</i> . Reflections on MUP event at Stormont and the announcement by Minister of Health in Northern Ireland to progress work in relation to MUP. Discussion on the <i>Substance Use Commissioning and Implementation Plan (2024-2028)</i> .

Appendix two: Timeline and highlights of NSAPAG Knowledge Exchange Seminars

Date	Location	Some of the highlights
30 November 2015	Belfast	Using alcohol licensing data in public health research and policy
3 May 2017	Dublin	Alcohol, self-harm, and suicide – an all-island perspective. Opened by Marcella Corcoran Kennedy, Minister of State for Health Promotion in Ireland
22 May 2019	Belfast	Monitoring alcohol strategy: learning from the Scottish experience
3 December 2020	Online meeting	Alcohol-related Harms in Nightlife Settings on the island of Ireland
16 November 2023	Dublin	Alcohol-related liver disease in Ireland and Northern Ireland
26 September 2024	Belfast	Reducing alcohol harms in Northern Ireland: The potential of Minimum Unit Pricing

Appendix three: NSAPAG Newsletters

The NSAPAG has supported its members by providing regular and relevant resources to facilitate full engagement in discussions and to have a meaningful impact on alcohol policy development and implementation. The following list provides an overview of the updates and newsletters issued by the NSAPAG.

Date	Highlights
June 2024	<p>Published factsheets by the Health Research Board (HRB).</p> <p>Report on alcohol attitudes and behaviours in Ballymun (2011–2023).</p> <p>Data on alcohol-specific deaths in Northern Ireland (2012–2022).</p> <p>Overview of proposed alcohol licensing legislation in Ireland.</p> <p>Upcoming events: WHO webinar series, Growing Up in Ireland report launch, NSAPAG event in Stormont (September).</p>
April 2024	<p>Scottish Parliament announced continuation of Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) with price increase to 65p/unit.</p> <p>Northern Ireland Department of Health released its first update on <i>Prevention Harm, Empowering Recovery</i>.</p> <p>HRB report on alcohol availability, affordability, and harm; article on alcohol branding.</p> <p>Videos from the <i>Alcohol Explained</i> series on alcohol and cardiovascular health.</p>
February 2024	<p>Drug-related deaths in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Presentations to drug and alcohol treatment services in Northern Ireland. - Deaths among homeless individuals in Ireland.</p> <p>Children affected by alcohol misuse (<i>State of the Nation's Children report</i>).</p> <p>Blogs and campaigns, including WHO Europe's call for NCD prevention and British-Irish Council Drugs & Alcohol Work Sector report.</p>
December 2023	<p>Latest data from the <i>Healthy Ireland Survey</i> and <i>Health Survey Northern Ireland</i>.</p> <p>Restrictions on alcohol advertisements (<i>Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018</i>) to take effect January 2025.</p> <p>UK Government guidance for alcohol and drug treatment services.</p> <p><i>Alcohol is Toxic</i> video campaign by 'Balance North East' highlighting alcohol as a cause of cancer.</p>

November 2023	<p>HRB <i>Regional alcohol-related harm - County level factsheet</i>.</p> <p><i>2022 Annual Report of the Medical Bureau of Road Safety</i>.</p> <p><i>Young People's Behaviour and Attitudes Survey 2022</i> (Northern Ireland). - Parliamentary questions and Seanad debates on alcohol.</p> <p>Upcoming consultations on MUP, alcohol labelling, clinical guidelines, and substance use strategy.</p>
September 2023	<p>HRB publications on alcohol treatment services and factsheets on alcohol use among adults and young people.</p> <p>HSE <i>Health and Wellbeing Annual Report 2022</i> and <i>Health Services Healthy Ireland Implementation Plan 2023-2027</i>.</p>
July 2023	<p>Final evaluation report on MUP in Scotland.</p> <p>Report on COVID-19's impact on service users/providers in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Analysis of addiction treatment data and geographic deprivation in Ireland.</p> <p>Scottish anti-stigma campaign: <i>See Beyond, See the Lives</i>.</p>
May 2023	<p>Report on the costs and benefits of the <i>Sale of Alcohol Bill</i>.</p> <p>WHO report on zero and low alcohol drinks.</p> <p>Government of Ireland plans for alcohol health labels.</p> <p>New all-island Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Hub and PEACEPLUS Funding Programme.</p>
March 2023	<p>Impact of MUP on alcohol-related deaths/hospitalizations in Scotland.</p> <p>IAS report on alcohol-related violence (England/Wales).</p> <p>Public Health Scotland evidence review of COVID-19's impact on alcohol harm.</p>
December 2022	<p><i>Health Survey Northern Ireland</i> and <i>Northern Ireland Substance Misuse Database</i>.</p> <p>Reports on MUP in Scotland/Wales.</p> <p>WHO 2022 advocacy briefs on reducing alcohol consumption.</p>
November 2022	<p>General Scheme of the <i>Sale of Alcohol Bill (Ireland)</i>.</p> <p>NISRA data on alcohol-specific deaths in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Study on UK public health teams' views on public health licensing.</p>

September 2022	<p>HRB report on alcohol/drug use among children in Ireland.</p> <p>Department of Justice (Ireland) report on addressing anti-social behaviour.</p> <p>Podcast: <i>Alcohol licensing laws discussion with Dr Helen McAvoy and Prof. Niamh Fitzgerald.</i></p>
July 2022	<p>WHO report on MUP implementation.</p> <p>UK Alcohol Health Alliance report on alcohol labelling.</p> <p>Government of Ireland application to the EU for alcohol health warnings.</p>
June 2022	<p>Evaluation of MUP in Scotland.</p> <p>Annual report from UK Alcohol Health Alliance.</p> <p>WHO Draft Action Plan on Alcohol.</p>
May 2022	<p>Data from the <i>Northern Ireland Substance Misuse Database</i>.</p> <p>Analysis of alcoholic liver disease in Ireland (2007–2016).</p> <p>WHO Sustainable Development Goals alcohol policy measures review.</p>
April 2022	<p>Research on MUP's broad impact in Wales.</p> <p>Studies on substance use/mental health in displaced Ukrainian people.</p>
March 2022	<p>Alcohol Action Ireland/UCC research: four daily alcohol-related deaths in Ireland.</p>

Appendix four: Some additional NSAPAG resources

Date	Resources
2015	<u>North South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group – Proceedings from the Knowledge Exchange Forum</u>
2017	<u>Alcohol, self-harm and suicide</u>
2019	<u>Monitoring alcohol strategy - learning from the Scottish experience</u>
2019	<u>All-Island Alcohol Data Directory</u>
2020	<u>Alcohol-related Harms in Nightlife Settings on the island of Ireland</u>
2023	<u>Blog: Alcohol-related liver disease on the island of Ireland – conversations on a silent epidemic</u>
2024	<u>Event briefing - Reducing Alcohol Harms in Northern Ireland: The potential of Minimum Unit Pricing</u> <u>Recording available: Reducing Alcohol Harms in Northern Ireland: The potential of Minimum Unit Pricing</u>

Appendix five: Acknowledgements

The NSAPAG is very grateful to the following individuals who have supported its work and achievements to reduce harms due to alcohol across the island of Ireland:

Colin Angus, University of Sheffield

Clare Beeston, Public Health Scotland

Brendan Bonner, Public Health Agency

Alex Bunting, Inspire

Suzanne Costello, Health Service Executive and Alcohol Action Ireland

Dr Nathan Critchlow, University of Stirling

Dr Paul Darragh, British Medical Association

Alison Douglas, Alcohol Focus Scotland

Anne Doyle, Health Research Board

Prof Niamh Fitzgerald, University of Stirling

Prof David Fone, Cardiff University

Hugh Greaves, Ballymun Local Drugs and Alcohol Task Force

Dr Sheila Gilheany, Alcohol Action Ireland

Sir Ian Gilmore, Alcohol Health Alliance UK

Michelle Gilmore, Southern Health and Social Care Trust

Jacqueline Healy, National Women's Council

Dr Katherine Higgins, Queen's University Belfast

Prof Katy Holloway, University of South Wales

Dr Joanne Hopkins, Public Health Wales

Prof Vittal Katikireddi, University of Glasgow

Helen Kearns, University College Dublin

Prof Eamon Keenan, Health Service Executive

Marcella Corcoran Kennedy, TD and Minister of State for Health Promotion (Ireland)

Prof Wulf Livingston, Glyndwr University, Wrexham

Inspector Gabriel Moran, Police Service of Northern Ireland

Dr Tobias Maharaj, Beaumont Hospital, Dublin

Dr Helen McAvoy, Institute of Public Health

Dr Mark McCann, University of Glasgow

Conor McCafferty, Zest NI

Dr Roger McCorry, Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast

Dr Elizabeth Mitchell, Institute of Public Health

Dr Deirdre Mongan, Health Research Board

Michael Murphy, University of Salford

Dr Emily Nicholls, University of York

Dr James Nicholls, Alcohol Research UK

Dr Coilín ÓhAiseadha, Health Service Executive

Dr Mary O'Mahony, Health Service Executive

Prof Des O'Neill, Tallaght Hospital and Trinity College Dublin

Dr Tara O'Neill, Ulster University

Prof Siobhan O'Neill, Ulster University

Dr Joanna Purdy, Institute of Public Health

Dr Niamh Shortt, University of Edinburgh

Dr Noel Richardson, Carlow Institute of Technology

Prof John Ryan, Beaumont Hospital, Dublin

Dr Noel Sharkey, Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast

Dr Bobby Smyth, Health Service Executive

Bill Stewart, Department of Health, Northern Ireland

(affiliations are correct at the time of contribution to NSAPAG meetings or events)

5. References

1. [Revenue \(Irish Tax and Customs\)](#)
2. [Healthy Ireland Survey 2024](#)
3. [Doyle, A., Mongan, D. and Galvin, B. \(2024\) HRB Overview Series 13. Alcohol: availability, affordability, related harm, and policy in Ireland. Dublin: Health Research Board](#)
4. [Healthy Ireland Survey 2024](#)
5. [National Drug-Related Deaths Index](#)
6. [Health Survey Northern Ireland 2023/24](#)
7. [NISRA \(2024\) Alcohol-specific deaths in Northern Ireland 2023](#)
8. [WHO \(2022\) Turning down the alcohol flow Background document on the European framework for action on alcohol, 2022–2025](#)
9. [McAvoy, H. and Purdy, J. \(2014\) Reducing alcohol-related harm by addressing availability - Maximising benefits from North South cooperation. Dublin and Belfast: Institute of Public Health](#) (on behalf of the North South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group)
10. [UK Chief Medical Officers' \(2016\) Low Risk Drinking Guidelines](#)
11. [Institute of Alcohol Studies \(2018\) Brexit battlegrounds: where are public health and the alcohol industry likely to clash in the years ahead?](#)
12. [McAvoy, H. and Purdy, J. \(2014\) Reducing alcohol-related harm by addressing availability - Maximising benefits from North South cooperation. Dublin and Belfast: Institute of Public Health](#) (on behalf of the North South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group)
13. [North South Hidden Harm Group \(2015\) Opening our eyes to hidden harm.](#)
14. [Purdy, J. \(2024\) Blog: Alcohol-related liver disease on the island of Ireland – conversations on a silent epidemic.](#)
15. [UK Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs \(2003\) Hidden Harm – Responding to the needs of children of problem drug users](#)
16. [McAvoy, H. and Purdy, J. \(2014\) Reducing alcohol-related harm by addressing availability - Maximising benefits from North South cooperation. Dublin and Belfast: Institute of Public Health](#) (on behalf of the North South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group)
17. [UK Chief Medical Officers' \(2016\) Low Risk Drinking Guidelines](#)
18. [Government of Ireland \(2017\) Reducing Harm Supporting Recovery: A health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland \(2017-2025\)](#)

Institute of
Public Health



publichealth.ie

Dublin Office

700 South Circular Road
Dublin 8
DO8 NH90, Ireland
T: + 353 1 478 6300

Belfast Office

4th Floor, Eagle Star House
5 - 7 Upper Queen Street,
Belfast
BT1 6FB, Northern Ireland
T: + 44 28 90 648494

info@publichealth.ie