

Non-Communicable Disease Prevention: Mapping Future Harm



Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are the leading cause of death and ill health in Scotland. Diseases such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes, stroke, liver disease and lung disease were responsible for more than 40,000 deaths in 2020.¹ It is estimated that more than 1 in 5 of these deaths could be prevented through public health action.

Among the key drivers of these preventable deaths are commercial risk factors such as smoking, alcohol and high fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) food and drinks. The way these products are made widely available, are heavily marketed and how affordably they are priced, drives consumption at the expense of our right to health.

Disparities in the levels of consumption of health harming commodities contribute to the widening of health inequalities in Scotland, with people in the most deprived areas expected to live a healthy life for 24 years less than those in the least deprived areas.²

Projections to 2026

Analysis conducted by BHF Scotland,³ projected the levels of smoking status, alcohol consumption and obesity, as

well as the related disease burden of deaths and ill health from NCDs up to the end of this Parliamentary session.

Alcohol

Rates of hazardous or harmful drinking have stalled between 2017–2019 at around 24%, despite seeing a decrease prior to this period. If the current trend continues, 20% of the population will be harmful or hazardous drinkers by 2026, with health inequalities persisting between the richest and poorest.

However, this is based on pre-pandemic data and the pandemic has created significant changes in drinking patterns that we believe mean that this trend is likely to be worse than the projection. We also know that there are significant inequalities in alcohol harm with alcohol-related deaths 4.3 times higher in the most deprived areas than the least.⁴

Tobacco

In 2019, around 17% of adults in Scotland identified as smokers.⁵ This figure has steadily declined in recent decades, but progress has slowed in recent years. Our projections suggest that smoking rates will continue to decrease to 13% by 2026, however, the burden of tobacco on our most deprived communities will persist, with levels remaining above 20%.

If current trends continue, we project that the Scottish Government's 2034 tobacco free generation target will be missed. It is possible for this target to be met, but it would require renewed action to support over 530,000 people to quit or not take up smoking by 2034.

Obesity

29% of Scotland's adults were classified as having obesity in 2019 and our projections suggest that the rate of obesity related NCD deaths could increase by 10% by 2026. There is also significant and increasing inequalities in rates of obesity, with rates highest in the two most deprived quintiles. If these trends were to continue, the prevalence of obesity in these areas would be 37% and 39% in 2026, compared to 21% in the least deprived.

These projections highlight the urgent need for action and any delay will result in significant death and ill health across Scotland, with the burden felt most in our poorest communities.

Public Support for Action

A YouGov poll commissioned on behalf of the NCD Prevention Coalition found that two thirds (67%) of Scotland's adults believe the Scottish Government should be doing more to improve public health. There is an urgent, collective desire to make Scotland a healthier place to live and for the Scottish Government to reclaim their position as world leaders in public health.

This demand for change is reflected in our polling of adults in Scotland across three areas of public health policy: **availability, price and promotion and marketing of health harming products.** Among the results we found that:

- **81% of adults would support policies which would ensure fruit and vegetable costs are cheaper than unhealthy foods.**
- **78% were in favour of banning advertising of all tobacco and nicotine products.**
- **62% would welcome restrictions on alcohol advertising, sponsorship and promotions online, in public spaces and at sport and cultural events.**

The public support for action is clear, as is the urgent need to reduce the burden of NCDs, particularly in our most deprived communities. Renewed policy action on these areas would work to give everyone in Scotland the opportunity to live a healthy life, reducing the significant burden of preventable death and ill health from NCDs.

The longer the Scottish Government delays reducing the harm of health harming commodities, the more detrimental the impact will be. It is imperative action is taken urgently to reduce this harm and save thousands of lives across Scotland from NCDs.

To address the urgency of the situation and minimise the lives lost, we have been calling for a number of actions to be introduced within the first year of the current Parliament. We are pleased to see progress across many of these calls, including 2 that have been fully achieved. However, further action is needed.

We welcome the commitment by the Minister for Public Health to bring forward a Public Health Bill and we are calling for the Scottish Government to bring this forward at the earliest opportunity to complete the implementation of the calls below.

- 1. Introduce regulations to Parliament on the domestic advertising of e-cigarettes following a public consultation on the measures.**
- 2. Consult on restricting the advertising and promotion of alcohol as was committed to in the 2020-2021 Programme for Government.**
- 3. Review the minimum unit price for alcohol in line with the Scottish Government's commitment and uprate the minimum unit price for alcohol to at least 65p per unit.**
- 4. Introduce a bill to restrict the promotion of high fat, sugar and salt food and drink.**
- 5. Publish an Out of Home (healthy food choices when eating out) Strategy with clear actions.**
- 6. Improve weight management, alcohol treatment, and smoking cessation services so they meet people's needs, ensuring they become core services in the Covid-19 recovery.**

To read our full report, please follow this link:

www.bhf.org.uk/what-we-do/in-your-area/scotland/ncd-prevention-report



1. National Records of Scotland (2020) Vital Events - Deaths | National Records of Scotland ([nrscotland.gov.uk](https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk)).
2. National Records of Scotland (2022) Healthy Life Expectancy, <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files/statistics/healthy-life-expectancy/18-20/healthy-life-expectancy-18-20-report.pdf>.
3. British Heart Foundation (2022) Scotland: NCD Prevention Report, <https://www.bhf.org.uk/what-we-do/in-your-area/scotland/ncd-prevention-report>.
4. National Records of Scotland (2021) Alcohol-specific deaths, <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/vital-events/deaths/alcohol-deaths>.
5. Scottish Government (2020) Scottish Health Survey 2019 - volume 1: main report.