

Advocacy Guide

No More Half Measures: Time To Get Serious About Alcohol Harm

Information About The Scottish Elections and How To Have Your Views Heard



Each week, 50 people in Scotland die because of alcohol and every 15 minutes someone is hospitalised. One in five people drink at levels that harm their health.

Alcohol is linked to over 200 conditions, including liver disease, cancer, heart disease and stroke, affects mental health, contributes to family breakdown, and was a factor for 17% of children on Scotland's child protection register in 2024. One in two people are harmed by someone else's drinking.

Alcohol harm costs Scotland up to £10 billion annually, including £700 million to the NHS, £1.2 billion in lost productivity and £1 billion linked to crime. The burden falls heaviest on deprived communities, where people are six times more likely to be hospitalised and four and a half times more likely to die due to alcohol than those in the most affluent areas.

Despite alcohol being declared a public health emergency in 2021, progress has been insufficient. With bold leadership, we feel that the next Scottish Parliament can reduce harm, save lives and build a fairer, healthier Scotland.

Ahead of the elections, Alcohol Focus Scotland has launched their manifesto and are calling on all candidates and parties to commit to:

- **Restrict alcohol marketing, including advertising outdoors and in public spaces, sport and event sponsorship, and displays in shops.**
- **Mandate nutrition and health-related information, including health warnings, on alcohol labels.**
- **Introduce the automatic review and uprating of the minimum unit price for alcohol.**
- **Reform the system for licensing off-trade and online sales, to firstly cap, and then reduce the off trade availability of alcohol.**
- **Increase funding for services through a levy on off-trade retailers.**
- **Increase early diagnosis for liver disease by wider implementation of non-invasive liver scans.**

To view the full version of our manifesto, please scan the QR code or visit the link below:



<https://www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk/resources/No-More-Half-Measures-Website.pdf>



Background

Scottish Parliament elections choose members of the Scottish Parliament, which has significant powers over public health in Scotland. Because health policy, alcohol licensing, justice, and aspects of taxation are devolved, the Parliament plays a central role in tackling alcohol harm - an issue that has had serious social and health consequences across the country. Decisions on measures such as minimum unit pricing, funding for treatment services, and prevention strategies are made in Scotland rather than by the Parliament of the United Kingdom.

Elections are held every five years, with the next one scheduled for 7 May 2026.

How To Vote

To vote in a Scottish Parliament election, you must first register to vote. You can do this online through the Electoral Commission website, and you will usually need your National Insurance number and address.

On election day, most people vote at a polling station, which is usually open from 7am to 10pm. Voters receive two ballot papers: one to choose a local constituency candidate and another to vote for a political party or candidate on the regional list.

If you cannot attend in person, you can apply for a **postal vote**, which allows you to complete and return your ballot papers by post. You can also apply for a **proxy vote**, where someone you trust votes at the polling station on your behalf. You can apply for both of these methods on the Electoral Commission website.

Key Deadlines for the 2026 Election:

- Register to vote: **Monday 20 April 2026**
- Apply for a postal vote: **Tuesday 21 April 2026**
- Apply for a proxy vote: **Tuesday 28 April 2026**
- Polling day: **Thursday 7 May 2026 (7am-10pm)**



How Do I Make My Voice Heard on Alcohol Harm?

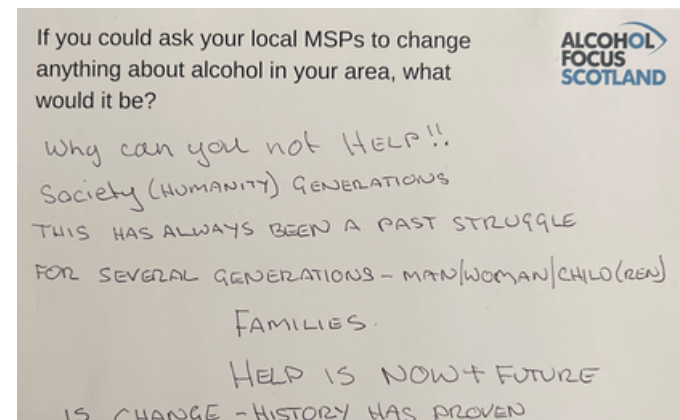
Scottish elections give you the chance to shape how the country responds to alcohol-related harm and supports affected communities. Here are some of the ways you can make sure your voice is heard:

Engage with Candidates – Attend hustings, which are public meetings where election candidates speak about their policies and answer questions from voters. Hustings give you the chance to hear directly from candidates, compare their views, and ask them about the issues that matter to you, such as alcohol harm. Attending a husting is one of the best ways to make your views heard and hold candidates accountable before the election.

Use Social Media – Share your views, tag local MSPs, and help raise awareness by sharing Alcohol Focus Scotland's manifesto. Social media is a powerful way to reach decision-makers and engage others on the issues that matter to you.

Reach Out to Alcohol Focus Scotland (AFS) – If you have ideas, concerns, or experiences related to alcohol harm, we would love to hear from you. You can email involvement@alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk to share your thoughts and help shape their work.

Scottish Elections Website Section – Our website now has a dedicated Scottish Elections section with more details, including a live list of upcoming hustings you can attend. You can scan the QR code or visit: <https://www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk/involved-action>



Getting to know candidates

If you want to make your views on alcohol harm heard, it's important to know who your candidates are and how to reach them. Two helpful websites can guide you:

Who Can I Vote For?

This website shows all candidates standing in your constituency and regional list for the Scottish Parliament election. For each candidate, you can find:

- Official websites – Learn about their policies and priorities.
- Social media accounts – Follow updates and engage in discussions.
- Statements – See what they have said on key issues.
- Contact details – Some candidates provide an email address so you can ask about alcohol policy, public health, or local concerns.

They Work For You

This website lets you explore your current MSPs. By entering your postcode, you can see:

- Your local MSPs – Who represents your area.
- Debates and speeches – What they've said on issues like alcohol policy and public health.
- Voting record – How they've voted on matters that affect your community

By using both websites together, you can identify candidates, understand their positions, and reach out with your views, ensuring your voice is heard before the election.



(<https://whocanivotefor.co.uk/>)



(<https://www.mysociety.org/>)



On the next page, we have provided a template for contacting your local candidates!

Email template

This template is designed to make it easier to contact your local MSPs, post or pre election. Please don't feel you have to stick to it. Adding your own experiences and telling them why tackling alcohol harm in Scotland is important to you will help your email stand out.



Dear [MSP name],

I am writing to urge you to make tackling alcohol harm in Scotland a clear priority in the next Parliamentary term.

Alcohol harm continues to have a devastating impact on individuals, families and communities across Scotland. Every week lives are lost, thousands of people require hospital treatment each year, and the burden falls disproportionately on our most deprived communities. Beyond the human cost, alcohol harm places significant pressure on our NHS, social care, justice services and local economies.

Although alcohol harm was declared a public health emergency, progress in reducing deaths and improving access to treatment and prevention has not gone far enough. Without sustained political leadership and long-term commitment, we risk seeing further increases in alcohol-related deaths and widening health inequalities.

I believe the next Scottish Parliament must treat alcohol harm as a national priority by investing in treatment and recovery services, strengthening prevention policies, improving early detection of liver disease, and addressing the inequalities that drive disproportionate harm in disadvantaged communities.

Could you please let me know whether you will commit to making alcohol harm reduction a priority in your work as my MSP? I would also welcome hearing what specific actions you plan to take to ensure meaningful progress is delivered.

(Here, you can share a brief personal story or experience that highlights why this issue matters to you)

Yours Sincerely,

(Name)

(Address – including postcode)

This allows your MSPs to know that you are their constituent.

Stay in touch

If you send a letter to your local MSP, we would be grateful if you could let us know! Please feel free to copy us into your emails.

We are always keen to hear from you about your ideas about advocacy or any examples you'd like to share. Please contact us with any ideas or examples you may have.

If you need any assistance when using this guide, or would like to give us feedback, please get in touch.

Contact us at involvement@alcohol-focus.org.uk.

Thank you for your support!





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