

Maree Todd, Minister for Mental Wellbeing, Public Health, Sport, Alcohol and Drugs

Last year, we wrote to you as a collective of 70 organisations calling for urgent action to reduce alcohol deaths. Alcohol harm remains a public health emergency, with nearly 1,200 people losing their lives in 2024 for entirely preventable, alcohol specific reasons. Alcohol remains entrenched in Scottish life, with all of the consequent effects on our nation's health, economy, justice system and happiness.

We welcome the Scottish Government's Alcohol and Drugs Strategic Plan, setting out your approach to address alcohol and drug harms over the next ten years. In particular, we are pleased that a number of calls from this Urgent Action on Alcohol campaign were included, including earlier detection of liver disease, potential expansion of the Alcohol Care Team model, increasing access to residential detox services and commissioning a national needs assessment for alcohol treatment and care services.

Thank you for listening to our calls on these matters. These evidence-based actions can save lives – as long as they are funded and resourced appropriately. An increase in funding for alcohol treatment services remains an essential component.

However, it is not enough to intervene when much of the harm has already been done. We need to take urgent action to reduce alcohol consumption and ensure fewer people are at risk in the first place. Scottish Government's commitment to an Alcohol Harm Prevention Plan is extremely welcome, but it must set out decisive actions. In particular, it must secure the legacy of this Scottish Government's world-leading policy on minimum unit pricing, by ensuring that it will be automatically uprated in future. MUP is surely one of the most evaluated policies ever introduced in Scotland. It has more than demonstrated its effectiveness, and it must now be permanently embedded. We urge you to ensure that automatic uprating of MUP features in the upcoming Programme for Government.

Beyond this essential step, we continue to believe that a sustained and systemic response is needed to truly tackle Scotland's catastrophic relationship with alcohol. This must include:

- Reforming the system for licensing off-trade and online sales to firstly cap and then reduce off-trade availability of alcohol.
- Restricting alcohol marketing, including advertising outdoors, in public spaces and sport and event sponsorships, as well as displays in shops.
- Mandating the provision of health-related information, including health warnings, on alcohol products

Your ministerial portfolio includes Scotland's greatest health challenges, which also create an enormous cost to our public services and the economy. If Scotland is going to make real progress reducing alcohol deaths, preventing the harm, disease and family breakdown alcohol can cause and tackling health inequalities, it must be a priority for this government. The commitments we've seen in this strategic plan are very welcome – but this must be matched by political will.

As a coalition, we stand ready to assist government in this matter, and would be very pleased to arrange a further discussion.

Yours sincerely

Carolyn Lochhead, Chief Executive of Alcohol Focus Scotland

Elinor Jayne, Director of Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP)

Laura Mahon, Chief Executive Officer, Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs (SFAD)

Tracey McFall, Chief Executive, Scottish Recovery Consortium

Louise Stewart, Director, WithYou

Becky Duff, Director for Scotland, Carers Trust

Professor Sir Ian Gilmore, Chair of the Alcohol Health Alliance

Dr Katherine Severi, Chief Executive of the Institute of Alcohol Studies

Dr Ewan Forrest, Alcohol Lead of the British Society of Gastroenterology

Professor Strachan, Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh

Professor Hany Eteiba, President of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow

Gillian Reilly, Chair of Glasgow Alcohol and Drug Partnership

Christine Laverty, Chair of Edinburgh Alcohol and Drug Partnership

Stephen Brown, Chair of Orkney Alcohol and Drug Partnership

Justin Jansen, Co-ordinator of Moray Alcohol and Drug Partnership

Professor Niamh Fitzgerald, Director/Head of Institute for Social Marketing & Health, School of Public Health & Society, University of Stirling

Pamela Healy OBE, Chief Executive Officer, Liver UK

Lee Ball, Director of Addictions for The Salvation Army and Helen Murdoch
Assistant Director of Strategic Operations and Development (Scotland) for The
Salvation Army

Gary Meek, Chief Executive of Blue Triangle

Lesley Ross, Chair of the Scottish Alcohol Counselling Consortium (SACC)

Margaret Halbert, Chief Executive Officer of Liber8 Lanarkshire

Rebecca Mitchell, Family Addiction Support Service (FASS)