



Monitoring alcohol strategy - learning from the Scottish experience

Outcomes of a Knowledge Exchange Forum hosted by the North South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group.

Belfast, 22 May 2019



An Roinn Sláinte
Department of Health



Department of
Health
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Foreword

In May 2019, the North South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group (NSAPAG) convened a knowledge exchange forum in Belfast.

This day-long event brought together academics, policy makers, clinicians, and the community and voluntary sector from Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and England to consider effective policy measures to tackle the harms caused by alcohol.

I would like to thank the participants and particularly our guest speakers. Their willingness to share their valuable expertise and experience contributed to this highly relevant forum.



The forum aimed to share knowledge on approaches to monitoring strategies to reduce alcohol-related harm in Ireland and Northern Ireland. It also facilitated an opportunity to gather insights from the roll-out of the new monitoring system in Scotland, and to explore the potential for partnership working to reduce alcohol-related harms.

The discussions held about the challenges and opportunities faced by governments in monitoring the impact of strategies are of interest to anyone involved in alcohol policy or public health; particularly to colleagues working towards the *Healthy Ireland* and *Making Life Better* frameworks.

This resource has been produced as a follow-up to the exchange. It presents an overview of the key takeaways, along with a summary of each speaker's presentation. You can also view the presentations on our website. I hope you find these resources useful to inform your work.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Suzanne Costello". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end.

Suzanne Costello
CEO
Institute of Public Health

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About the North South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group

This Knowledge Exchange was hosted by the North South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group (NSAPAG).

The NSAPAG was established in 2013 at the request of the Chief Medical Officers in Northern Ireland and Ireland and is chaired by the Institute of Public Health.

The NSAPAG facilitates cooperation to reduce alcohol-related harm on the island of Ireland. The group supports cooperation between jurisdictions by bringing together key government departments to support evidence-informed policy development on the island.

The following bodies and organisations for the membership of the NSAPAG – Departments of Health (ROI & NI); Institute of Public Health; Departments of Justice (ROI&NI); Department for Communities (NI); Health Service Executive; Public Health Agency; Health and Social Care Board (NI); Ulster University; Queen's University Belfast; Trinity College Dublin; Health Research Board; Royal College of Physicians in Ireland; Arc Healthy Living Centre; Alcohol Action Ireland and Cooperation and Working Together (CAWT).



This Knowledge Exchange was hosted by the North South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group (NSAPAG).

Aim and format of the Knowledge Exchange Forum

The forum aimed to:

- Share knowledge on approaches to monitoring strategies to reduce alcohol-related harm in Ireland and Northern Ireland.
- Gather insights from the roll-out of the monitoring system in Scotland.
- Exchange views on the opportunities and challenges faced by governments in monitoring the impact of strategies to reduce alcohol-related harm.
- Explore the potential for partnership working to enhance monitoring of the outcomes of strategies to reduce alcohol related harm.

This event featured a keynote presentation on the MESAS model (Monitoring and Evaluation Scotland's Alcohol Strategy).

This was followed by contributions from policy leads in both Departments of Health in Ireland and Northern Ireland. These presentations shared insights on opportunities and challenges in the monitoring of alcohol strategy in Northern Ireland and the Public Health (Alcohol) Act. A workshop and panel discussion explored participant feedback and the potential for enhanced partnerships on monitoring alcohol policy across Ireland, Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.

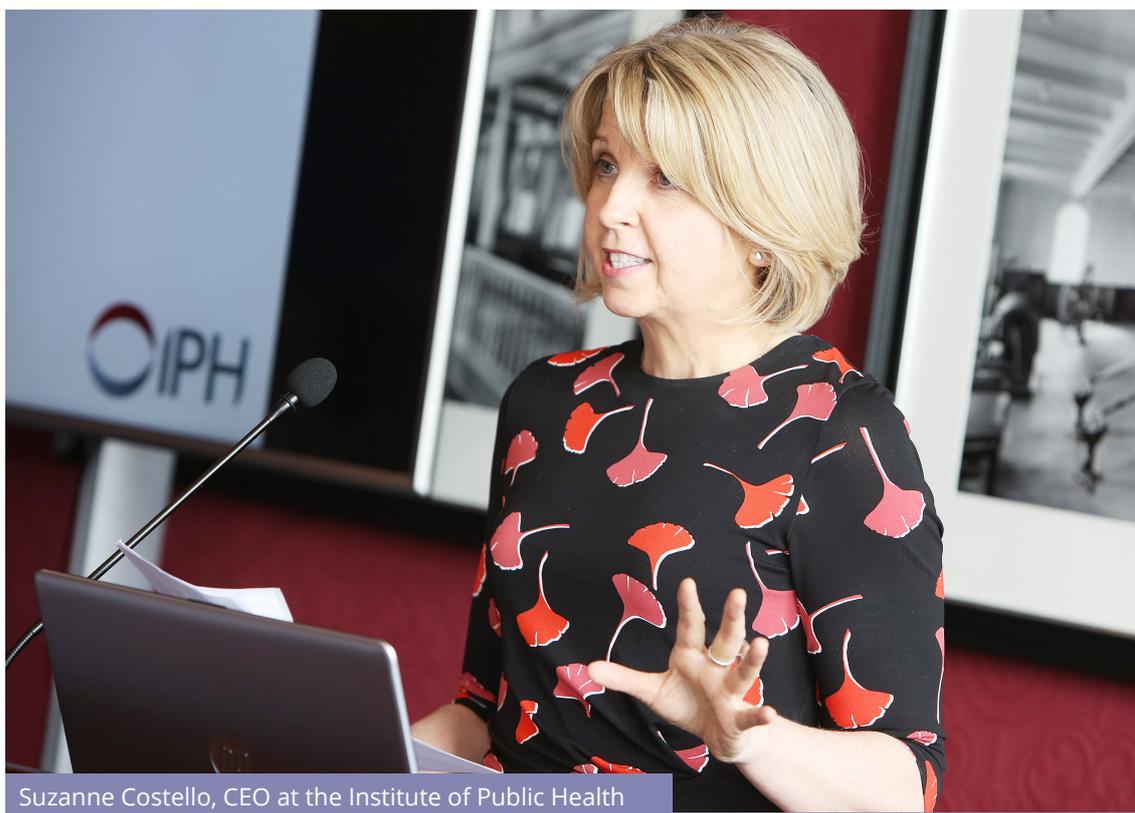
The event was attended by representatives from government departments and agencies, cross-border organisations, academic institutions and the advocacy and community and voluntary sector. There was representation from Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, England, and Wales.



Dr Ann Hope, alcohol policy specialist

Opening session: Value of knowledge sharing and collegiality

Suzanne Costello, CEO, Institute of Public Health



Suzanne Costello, CEO at the Institute of Public Health

Suzanne Costello delivered the opening address and welcomed colleagues from Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, England, and Wales. Suzanne briefed delegates on the work of the NSAPAG, and the role of the Institute in supporting population health.

Reflecting on her experience of the relatively recent passage of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act – legislation which aims to reduce alcohol consumption and associated harms in Ireland – Suzanne emphasised the value of knowledge sharing and close alliances between the UK and Ireland in developing alcohol policy.

Suzanne also highlighted the extent of the challenge to reduce alcohol-related harms on the island of Ireland, and the role of legislative and policy measures addressing availability, affordability, and the marketing of alcohol.

She acknowledged the leadership of Scotland's public health community in progressing alcohol policy and highlighted the value of learning from Scotland's monitoring system developed to measure outcomes of implementation.

Session 2: Monitoring the impact of Northern Ireland's alcohol strategy

Gary Maxwell, Health Development Policy Branch, Department of Health in Northern Ireland



Gary Maxwell, Department of Health in Northern Ireland

Gary Maxwell discussed the impact and monitoring of the New Strategic Direction on Alcohol and Drugs- Phase 2 (NSD-2) – the region's strategy to address alcohol and drug-related harms.

Gary highlighted that monitoring, evaluation and research was recognised as one of five key independent pillars of the strategy. He also shared recent findings from a review of the strategy.

The three strands of the review included outcomes and indicators, outputs and programme activity and stakeholder engagement. Key trends observed in the NSD-2 indicator set were shared. Indicators included consumption levels; binge drinking; health service use; deaths; criminal justice; and public confidence.

Reductions in childhood and adult alcohol consumption, and drink driving, were noted on a backdrop of rising health service use and mortality and widening inequalities in alcohol-related harms. Data from

the Impact Monitoring Tool, specifically designed to monitor outcomes for those who access services funded through NSD-2, was also shared.

Findings from a stakeholder engagement exercise were also highlighted. The complexity of establishing causal relationships between strategy outputs and strategy outcomes was raised, alongside the challenge of prioritisation in the strategy investments where there are multiple short-term, medium-term and long-term actions. Participants were invited to contribute to a 'pre-consultation' on the direction of a potential successor strategy, with an aspiration that a more formal consultation on a new strategy would be developed in 2020, subject to political approval. Key areas for future cooperation across the island of Ireland and with other UK jurisdictions were named as sharing of best practice; enhanced data sharing; shared monitoring of indicators; and joint commissioning of research.

Session 3: Monitoring the Public Health (Alcohol) Act

Denise Keogh, Tobacco and Alcohol Unit, Department of Health in Ireland

Denise Keogh presented on the opportunities and challenges of monitoring the Public Health (Alcohol) Act.

Denise emphasised the significant extent of alcohol-related harms in Ireland, including health and social harms, as well as costs to the economy. Denise discussed the main objectives of the Act which are to reduce alcohol consumption; delay the initiation of alcohol consumption; and regulate the supply and price of alcohol to minimise alcohol-related harm.

Insights were shared on the opportunities and challenges faced in the passage of the Bill. While the legislation has many sections, the main ones discussed included minimum unit pricing (MUP); labelling; marketing; structural separation and reduced visibility; and regulation of sales.

Denise acknowledged the importance of timely and high-quality modelling data,

on an all-island basis, in the development of the legislation, including cost-savings estimates from the implementation of legislative measures. She also acknowledged that there have been several years of hard work to get the legislation passed and that a schedule was now being finalised to enact the measures in a stepwise fashion.

Denise emphasised the importance of learning from the implementation of MUP in UK jurisdictions and the Department's intention to move forward on monitoring once a schedule for the enactment of measures was finalised. Denise concluded her presentation by inviting interest in the upcoming Global Alcohol Policy Conference scheduled to take place in Dublin in March 2020.

For further information on the Global Alcohol Policy Conference, go to www.gapa2020.org



Denise Keogh, Department of Health in Ireland

Session 4: Lessons from Scotland on monitoring alcohol strategy

Clare Beeston, Public Health Intelligence Principal with NHS Health Scotland

Clare Beeston presented on lessons from Monitoring and Evaluating Scotland's Alcohol Strategy – the MESAS model.

An organisational chart showing the governance and monitoring system for the Scottish alcohol strategy was presented which highlighted the central role of the NHS structures; the Chief Scientist Office; the supporting roles of the third sector organisations; and the Scottish Alcohol Research Network (SARN).

Clare emphasised a firm commitment to evaluation of the strategies aims to reduce consumption; support families and communities; create positive attitudes and choices' and improve treatment and support. The provisions of Scotland's alcohol minimum unit pricing legislation were presented, which provided the context for MESAS to evaluate the measures as part of sunset and review clauses in the legislature.

The key principles of the MESAS approach are to focus on what can be reasonably evaluated and to employ methods that are feasible, robust and proportionate to the value of the information.

A mixed-methods approach of connected quantitative and qualitative studies are being used to show both change and mechanisms, and these are aligned with a clear theoretical framework.

Clare shared insights on the use of multiple data sources to assess consumption patterns and her experience in responding to queries on the reliability of data estimates. It was recommended that monitoring approaches relevant to alcohol policy need to be aware of issues of science, scope, salience, and standing. Clarity on what can be monitored and what cannot be monitored is critical, and that a framework is needed to guide the use of data and meaningful interpretation. Communication formed an important part of the process.

Clare's presentation concluded with several graphs highlighting how interrogation of the data has revealed additional insights on issues such as jurisdictional differences, and interpretation of trends in inequalities and consumption patterns.



Clare Beeston, NHS Health Scotland

Session 5: Key points from workshop and panel discussion

A lively workshop and panel discussion highlighted the potential for enhanced partnerships on monitoring alcohol policy across Ireland, Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. Some of the key points raised included:

- Lack of alignment in the low-risk drinking guidelines for Ireland and Northern Ireland is an ongoing concern and potentially damaging to progressive cooperation.
- The differences in both measures, and low-risk limits, in the guidelines were compounded by perceived inadequate communication and poor public understanding of the link between consumption and risk.
- There is considerable untapped potential on the island of Ireland for greater sharing of data on alcohol policy outputs and outcomes.
- The importance of collecting baseline data in the immediate term to allow for the monitoring of impacts from the Public Health (Alcohol) Act was emphasised.
- All-island sales and consumption data would be valuable.
- Twinning or partnering of research institutes on the island and between Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales would be beneficial.
- Alcohol research is a small field on the island of Ireland and succession planning may be critical to ensure a

pool of qualified researchers and policy specialists are located here.

- Evidence is important, but there is an equally important task of crafting an accessible and meaningful narrative relating to that evidence – putting a ‘face’ on the issue.
- Retail sales data are underutilised but there are also significant barriers to accessing and sharing that data.
- There is an information deficit on the attitudes of the public to the acceptability of measures to address alcohol-related harms.

The most important investment needed to enhance monitoring of alcohol policy outcomes on the island of Ireland were:

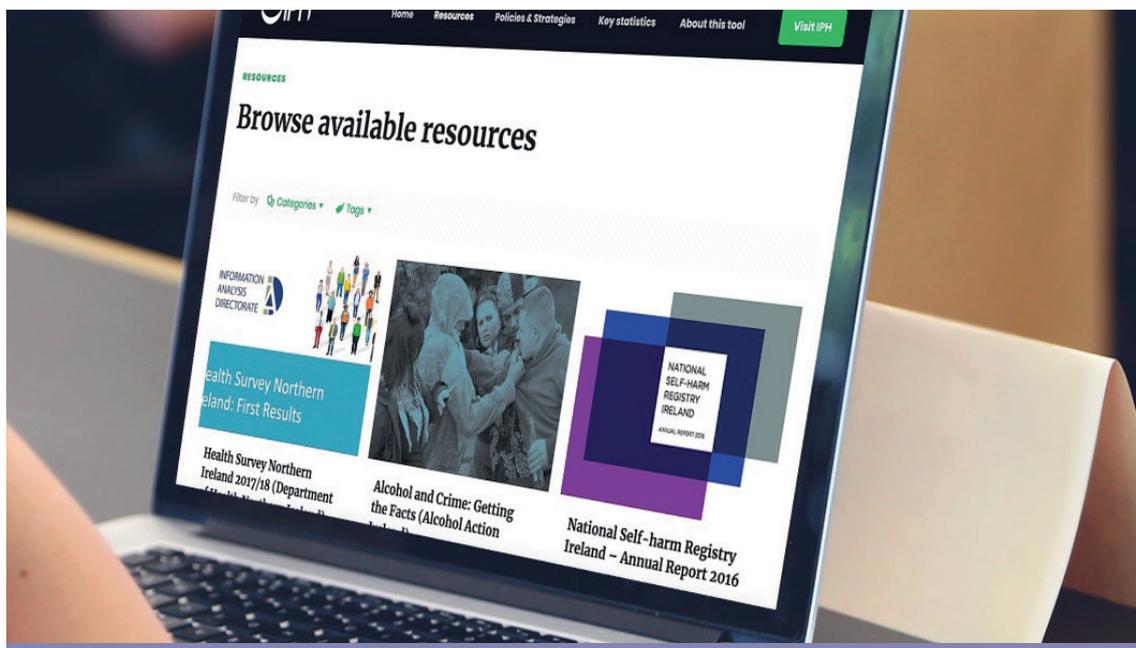
- Enhanced research capacity.
- Recording of alcohol consumption and harms within government datasets.
- Systems to monitor the affordability of alcohol.
- Sharing of resources and data.
- Consideration of data gaps.
- North South cooperation on common narratives on data and evidence.

Presentations from the event can be viewed at www.publichealth.ie



Alcohol Data Directory

A resource for policy makers



The Alcohol Data Directory – www.alcohol.iph.ie – is a resource collating data and research on alcohol consumption and related harms in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

This resource was developed as part of the work of the North South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group.

The resources in the directory are open access and originate from government-led departments and research.

The resource was launched in May 2019 and is updated quarterly. If you have data you would like to add to this tool, please email info@publichealth.ie for more details.





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