



August 2022

UPDATE

Alcohol-specific deaths increase again in 2021

Figures published by the National Records of Scotland showed that 1,245 people died from alcohol-specific causes in Scotland in 2021.

The number of deaths was 5% (55) higher than 2020 and is the highest number since 2008. Concerningly, deaths from alcohol were 5.6 times as frequent in the most deprived areas of Scotland compared to the least deprived areas.

In response to the figures, Alison Douglas, chief executive of Alcohol Focus Scotland, said, "The high number of deaths from alcohol in 2021 is devastating and comes on top of a substantial increase in 2020. Each of these 1,245 deaths is a life cut tragically short, and leaves behind family members and friends suffering their loss. These impacts are experienced unequally with many more people dying in our poorest communities. We seem to almost accept this toll as inevitable, but we should not; each death can be prevented."

 [Read more about the alcohol-specific deaths](#)

RESEARCH

The long-term effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on people's drinking habits

Two recent modelling studies conducted in England have highlighted the substantial impact that changes in drinking patterns during the pandemic have had and will continue to have on people's health. Evidence indicates that drinking habits polarised during the pandemic, with lighter drinkers having decreased and heavier drinkers having increased their consumption. Of major concern is the increase in high-risk and harmful drinking observed in England, which has sustained over the entirety of the pandemic.

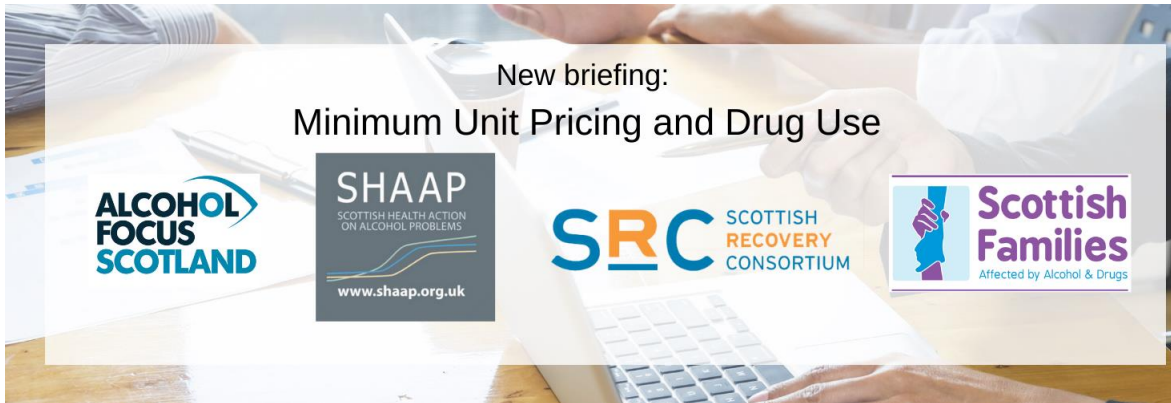
Both studies predict that these impacts will continue to be felt into the future, even in the best case scenario where drinking returns to pre-pandemic levels from 2022 onwards. One study estimated an increase in alcohol-attributable hospital admissions of up to 7.9%, an increase in alcohol-attributable deaths of up to 20.1%, and a rise in alcohol-related costs to the NHS of up to £5.2bn over 20 years.

Although it can take 20 years to see the full effects of changes in alcohol consumption, such as for cancers, the effects of the pandemic on people's drinking habits have already tragically translated into increased harm. Alcohol-specific deaths in England increased by 20% in 2020 as compared to 2021. Scotland has seen similar increases, with a 17% increase in alcohol-specific deaths in 2020, followed by a further 5% increase in 2021 (English 2021 figures are yet to be released).

Read the studies:

 [**The COVID hangover from the Institute of Alcohol Studies and Health Lumen**](#)

 [**Modelling the impact of changes in alcohol consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic on future alcohol-related harm in England from the University of Sheffield**](#)



Minimum Unit Pricing and Drug Use

Scottish health charities have responded to media headlines claiming that minimum unit pricing (MUP) has increased drug use in Scotland and is contributing to high levels of drug deaths.

Alcohol Focus Scotland, **Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP)**, **Scottish Recovery Consortium**, and **Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs** have published a joint briefing to highlight independent evaluation research and other relevant information on alcohol and drug deaths in Scotland.

 **[Read the briefing](#)**



ScotHealthCPG

The next meeting of the cross-party group on Improving Scotland's Health will be held via Zoom on Wednesday 21st September 2022 at 12:30 BST.

This meeting is only for registered members who have completed a disclosure of interest (DOI) form and for interested MSPs. Registered members will receive an email with the Zoom registration link.

✉ If you would like to become a member of the CPG please contact CEO@ashscotland.org.uk

🔗 [Find out more about the CPG](#)



Recovery Walk Scotland

Alcohol Focus Scotland will be attending this year's Recovery Walk Scotland which takes place in Paisley on Saturday 24th September. The theme this year is "Connected and Caring".

The annual event honours those we have lost, reminds us why recovery is so important, and helps us build connections and develop support networks.

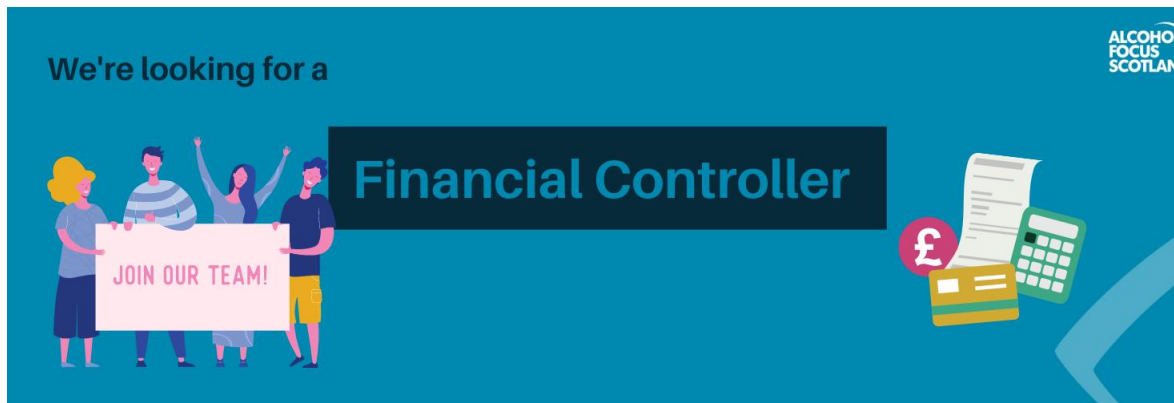
Alcohol Focus Scotland will be part of the festival village. We are looking forward to sharing our work and highlighting the different ways in which people can get

involved.

With lots of fun and games on offer, we hope you'll stop by for a chat with Marc, our Engagement and Partnership Coordinator.

 **Find out more and book your tickets from Scottish Recovery Consortium**

 **To find out more about our engagement work, contact Marc Buchanan**



Vacancy: Financial Controller

Alcohol Focus Scotland is hiring a part-time Financial Controller.

We are looking for a candidate with:

- An accountancy qualification (CA, ACCA, CIMA or equivalent)
- A minimum of 3 years relevant experience
- Experience in supervising and managing staff

Benefits include:

- A flexible work pattern
- Hybrid working
- The satisfaction of working with a skilled and dedicated team to make change happen

 **Find out more and apply by 12th September**

Call for improved alcohol labelling as new study reveals 'better-for-you' claims may mislead consumers

People have a right to know what is in their drink and to not be misled by labelling.

A new study from Cancer Council Victoria has found that of Australian adults who had drunk alcohol in the past 12 months, 75% believed that health-oriented marketing claims, such as 'natural', 'no added sugar', and 'low calorie', meant that an alcoholic drink was better for them than a product without these claims.

Jane Martin, Executive Manager of the Obesity Policy Coalition said that higher standards needed to be set for alcohol labelling to ensure consumers aren't being misled with promotional claims and statements. Alcohol labelling is currently under consideration by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ).

 [Find out more](#)



Mixed messages about alcohol and breastfeeding

Two-thirds of Australian women who breastfeed feel they did not fully understand the risks of drinking alcohol while breastfeeding, according to a Kantar Public study commissioned by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE).

93% of women surveyed who had consumed alcohol while breastfeeding had employed some harm minimisation strategy; however, many of these were ineffective.

The research highlights the need for more information on alcohol and breastfeeding, said FARE CEO Caterina Giorgi.

 [Read more](#)

RESEARCH

The global burden of cancer attributable to risk factors, 2010–19: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2019

Smoking, drinking alcohol, and being overweight increase people's risk of cancer, and cause almost half (44.4%) of all cancer deaths worldwide, according to a Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study in the Lancet.

The GBD measures the health lost from hundreds of diseases, injuries, and risk factors, to improve health systems and reduce inequalities.

Half of all male cancer deaths in 2019 (2.88m) were due to these risk factors, compared with more than a third of all female cancer deaths (1.58m).

 [Find out more](#)

 [Read the study](#)



RESEARCH

The socioeconomic gradient of alcohol use: an analysis of nationally representative survey data from 55 low-income and middle-income countries

According to new research published in The Lancet, urgent alcohol control policies and interventions are needed in low-income countries and low-middle-income countries to reduce harmful heavy episodic drinking, while alcohol policies need to be targeted at socially disadvantaged groups in upper-middle-income countries.

The study found that among males, the highest prevalence of both current drinking and heavy episodic drinking was found in lower-middle-income countries. Among females, the prevalence of current drinking was highest in upper-middle-income countries, and the prevalence of heavy episodic drinking was highest in low-income countries.

 [Read the study](#)

CONSULTATIONS

Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Alcohol Focus Scotland provided written evidence to the Scottish Government's consultation on a new

Suicide Prevention Strategy

Alcohol Focus Scotland has responded to the Scottish Government's consultation on a new suicide prevention strategy and action plan.

We believe that the development of the new suicide prevention strategy and action plan brings new opportunities to account for the links between alcohol and suicide, and have highlighted a number of areas where the proposals could be strengthened.

AFS shares the Scottish Government's vision of a Scotland where suicide is preventable, and where support is available to anyone contemplating suicide and to those who have lost a loved one to suicide. Suicide prevention is everyone's business.

 [Read our response](#)

Pre-budget scrutiny call for views

Alcohol Focus Scotland provided written evidence to two parliamentary calls for views on Pre-Budget Scrutiny, highlighting that alcohol causes increasingly significant health harms to the people of Scotland and costs the taxpayer billions

each year.

We believe the Scottish Government should use its fiscal powers to raise revenue from the sale of alcohol to support the COVID-19 recovery and fund public services (making the ‘polluter pay’), including improved recovery-oriented services.

Additionally, the Scottish Government should focus on implementing policies to reduce alcohol harms and subsequently lower the cost of alcohol harms, such as increasing the price of alcohol, reducing its availability, and controlling how it is marketed.

Read our responses:



Finance and Public Administration Committee



Health, Social Care and Sport Committee





