



# CALLING TIME FOR CHANGE

**North Wales Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy  
2025-2028**

**The North Wales Area Planning Board**

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## Foreword

This Strategy has now been 'refreshed' for 2025-2028, and builds upon the achievements to date, some of which have benefitted from Area Planning Board funding. These include – making it as easy as possible for the residents of North Wales to access information; support and signposting to services via Rethinking Our Drinking; support the development of the Very Brief Intervention training for workplaces; and supporting the Best Bar None schemes, rewarding pubs, bars and nightclubs to provide a safe, night time economy.

The Strategy for 2025-2028 builds on the work and partnerships developed, and aligns with the Welsh Government Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2019-2022, which seeks to reduce the harms associated with substance misuse, including alcohol, to the individual and wider society. Alcohol is thoroughly integrated into all aspects of society and our culture, is widely available, and has become increasingly affordable. Where alcohol is drunk sensibly it is enjoyed by many.

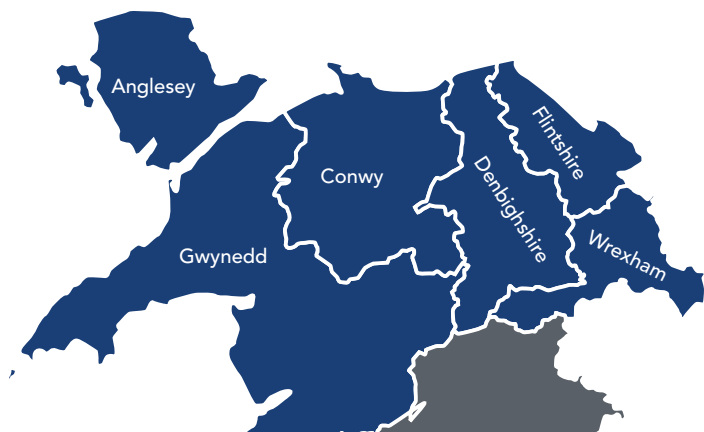
However, alcohol is a strong drug with serious health implications. Alcohol misuse has a marked effect on the physical and mental health wellbeing of the individual, as well as affecting their family and wider society. Alcohol misuse is strongly linked to crime and disorder, antisocial behaviour, assault and domestic violence. Compared with the pre Covid-19 period alcohol-specific death rates in Wales have risen.

There is no single organisation well placed to address all the harmful impacts of alcohol. This Strategy sets out our partnership commitment to reduce the harms of alcohol misuse over the next 3 years and requires a collaborative approach across the region whilst also addressing local issues. This is why the Strategy has been 'refreshed' in partnership and is endorsed by me, as Chair of the North Wales Area Planning Board, on behalf of strategic partners for substance misuse (alcohol).

Changing a culture and our relationship with alcohol is a long process consisting of incremental changes over a period of time. This Strategy sets out the priority areas required to achieve the long-term goal of reducing the harmful patterns and impacts of alcohol consumption and highlights the need for a whole system approach of collaborative partnership working to address the multiple harms of alcohol consumption.

**Andy Jones**

**Chair - North Wales Area Planning Board**



# Introduction

The ambition is to have a culture in North Wales that promotes and enjoys a positive relationship with alcohol, where non-drinking or low level alcohol consumption is valued and considered the norm. In addition, where alcohol adversely impacts on lives, abstinence is supported as a choice.

Our Area Planning Board (APB) is a partnership, which supports the planning, commissioning and performance management of substance misuse services for people across the whole of North Wales. Its role is to deliver the aims of the Welsh Government's Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2019 – 2022 'Revised in response to Covid-19' outlined below -

- Prevent harm
- Support those who misuse substances to improve their health and maintain recovery
- Support and protect families
- Tackle the availability of substances, and protect individuals and communities through enforcement
- Develop stronger partnerships; workforce development and service user involvement
- Improve the experience and quality of care for individuals and families through greater engagement and involvement

This Strategy aligns to the five ways of working in the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015<sup>2</sup>. This legislation ensures that all decisions taken by public bodies in Wales support sustainable development, thus ensuring that what we do today to meet the needs of our population does not compromise the ability of our future generations to meet their needs.

## How the Strategy has been developed



The APB prioritised the development of a Strategy for reducing the harm from alcohol. Across the different partners that make up the APB there are differing interpretations of what harm reduction means. It was therefore important to identify a range of partners to contribute to and develop the Strategy for 2020-2024 and the refresh for 2025-2028.

This local Strategy aligns with the National Alcohol Misuse Prevention Partnership (NAMPP) alcohol harm reduction multifaceted approach and adopts an Alcohol Theory of Change (ATOC) framework. The ATOC is a mechanism used to link evidence-based activities to the aims and outcomes of alcohol harm reduction. Presenting the strategic priorities and activities in this way informs and shapes future work on developing an implementation/action plan, and how progress and effectiveness can be monitored.



## Aim

The aim of the Strategy is to reduce alcohol related harms through:

- Promotion of a safe and sensible approach to alcohol consumption
- Protection of families and wider communities from adverse impacts of alcohol
- Reducing the impact of alcohol related harms
- Producing robust working relationships and referral pathways between service providers

The Strategy informs the APB future programme of work in respect of Alcohol Harm Reduction, and further supports the Board in highlighting areas likely to contribute to the reduction of harm from alcohol that lie outside its sphere of control. The Strategy shapes future allocation and spend of APB monies and resources that are separately put in by partner agencies and consumers.

## What we know about the harm from alcohol



Alcohol is **74%** more affordable than it was in 1987<sup>3</sup>. Minimum unit pricing aims to reduce alcohol-related harm by making alcohol less affordable.



The average drinker in the UK spends **£62,899** on alcohol in a lifetime<sup>4</sup>.



There were **109 alcohol-specific deaths** (all persons) in North Wales in 2023, an increase since 2019 when there were 89 alcohol-specific deaths<sup>5</sup>

Alcohol misuse is the **biggest risk factor** for death, ill-health and disability among 15-49 year-olds in the UK, and the fifth biggest risk factor across all ages<sup>6</sup>

In 2021-2023 in Wales, the alcohol-specific death rate was **16 per 100,000 persons**, rising from 13.7 in 2019-2021<sup>5</sup>.



Individuals **aged 50 and over** accounted for **65 per cent** of all those admitted to hospital for alcohol-specific conditions in 2022-23<sup>7</sup>.



Alcohol is a causal factor in more than **200 medical conditions**<sup>8</sup>.

# Drinking behaviour

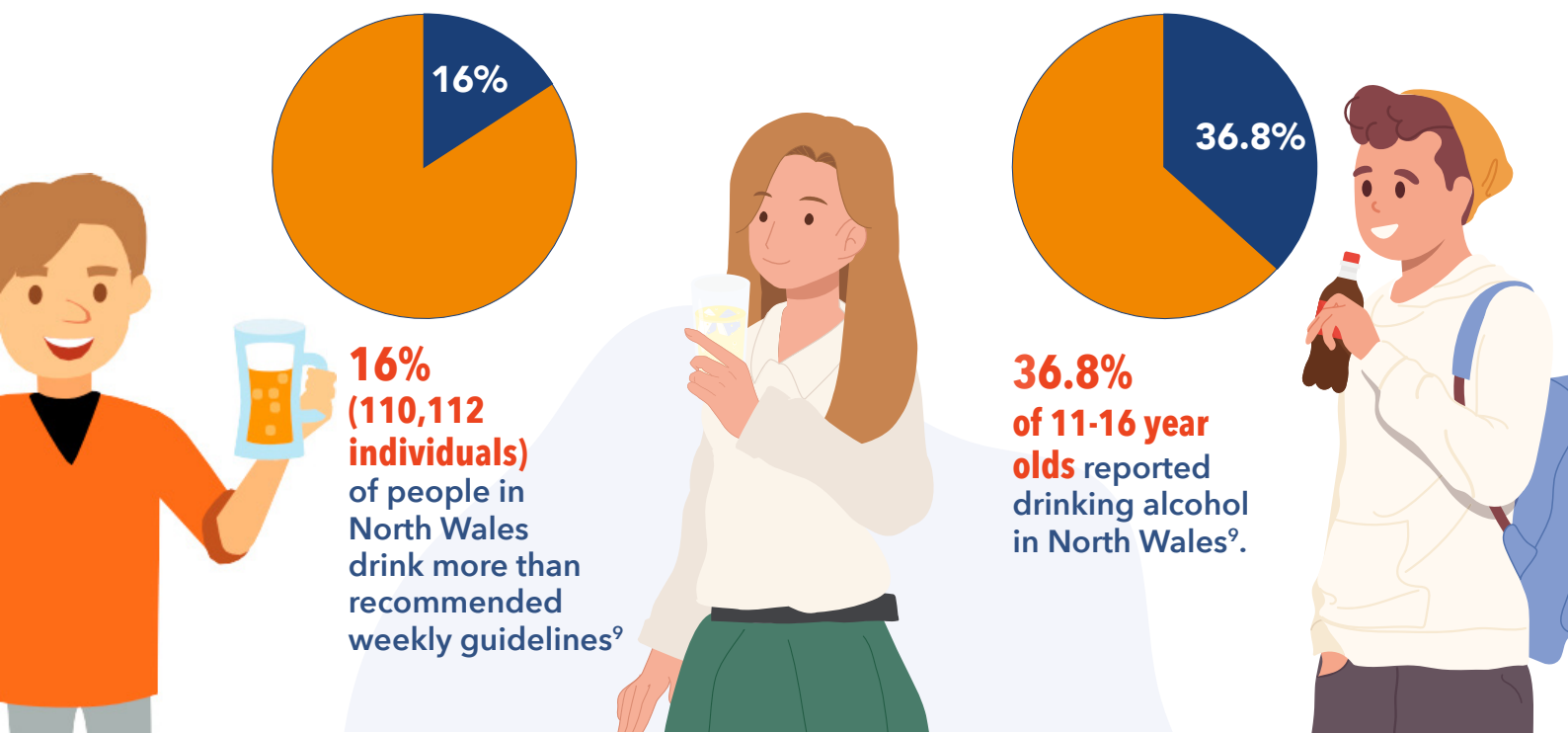
The current guideline states that to keep health risks from alcohol to a low level it is safest for men and women not to drink more than **14 units a week on a regular basis and spread drinking over 3 more days if regularly drinking as much as 14 units a week**. Table 1 gives an overview of the numbers of estimated adults in North Wales who drink above the current guidelines.



**Table 1:** Adults drinking above guidelines – age-standardised and age-specific percentage of adults (aged 16 or over) who reported drinking above guidelines (14 units a week)<sup>9, 10</sup>.

	Total population (2022 mid-year estimate ONS)	Estimated numbers drinking above recommended amounts*	Age Standardised percentage	Change since 2021/22
Isle of Anglesey	57,688	6115	10.6	↓
Gwynedd	100,124	17,221	17.2	↓
Conwy	96,367	17,057	17.7	↑
Denbighshire	80,182	7938	9.9	↓
Flintshire	128,665	26,247	20.4	↑
Wrexham	111,605	17,298	15.5	↓

\* Figures calculated using data from Public Health Wales Observatory<sup>9</sup> and the mid-2023 ONS population estimates<sup>10</sup>.





## Impact of alcohol misuse on families and communities

**Alcohol and substance misuse in parents has increased following the Covid-19 pandemic**, this can increase the number of domestic incidents and parental mental health problems, which may result in children being at risk of harm<sup>11</sup>.

**Table 2: Children receiving care and support due to parental substance or alcohol use in 2023**

County	Children receiving care and support due to parental substance or alcohol use - N (%)
Anglesey	340 (37%)
Gwynedd	755 (32%)
Conwy	535 (29%)
Denbighshire	490 (26%)
Flintshire	630 (39%)
Wrexham	370 (17%)
<b>Total North Wales</b>	<b>3120</b>



In 2023 in North Wales there were **3120 children** aged over 10 receiving care and support due to **parental substance use or alcohol use**, an increase of 7% since 2022<sup>12</sup>.

**Table 3: Children receiving care and who have a reported problem with alcohol or substance use in 2023**

County	Children receiving care and had a reported problem with alcohol or substance use (N)
Anglesey	10
Gwynedd	45
Conwy	25
Denbighshire	(no data*)
Flintshire	35
Wrexham	25
<b>Total North Wales</b>	<b>140</b>



In 2023 in North Wales, **over 140 children** aged over 10 were receiving care and **had a reported problem with alcohol or substance use**<sup>12</sup>.

*\*To minimise the risk of unwanted disclosure of personal data, all figures have been rounded to the nearest five. Where there are less than five children in any group, the actual number has been suppressed.*



## Where are we now

Much work has taken place in the development of partnerships in the region to tackle alcohol related issues and the delivery of services to support those that experience, directly or indirectly, the harms of alcohol. A high proportion of this partnership working has taken place at a local level with a limited reach.

Learning from the various alcohol projects in North Wales supports the need for a coordinated, regional multi-agency approach to tackling alcohol related harms.

Whilst the broad and diverse range of organisations engaged in dealing with alcohol related issues across the region demonstrates effective partnership working, further work is required to strengthen early identification of hazardous and harmful drinkers across all age groups, in addition to supporting prevention and early intervention approaches. This work needs to be embedded at a population, organisational, community, family and individual level.

## Future Vision

The vision for this Strategy is that through partnership working across the region, a change in the drinking culture in North Wales will be achieved, reducing the harm caused by alcohol to individuals, families and communities, and creating an environment where low level or abstinence from alcohol consumption is the norm and where harmful and hazardous drinkers are identified early and supported via intervention programmes.

This change can only be brought about by the active engagement and involvement of APB partners, public, volunteer and 3rd sector bodies across the region, working in a collaborative and integrated manner. The vision is to effect cultural change. Any cultural change takes time; both for the passing of old aspects of a culture and the adoption and embedding of new behavioural norms and attitudes. This is reflected in the long-term nature of the Strategy.

This Strategy articulates how the APB, together with its partners and stakeholders across North Wales will bring about that cultural change.



## Priority 1



### Safe and Supportive Environment

We will promote responsible retailing and support a safe, vibrant and diverse night-time economy, through working in partnership with local alcohol businesses to reduce alcohol related harm.

We will work with partners to provide supportive environments in the workplace and school settings.

## What do we know?

Supportive environments offer people protection from factors that can threaten good health and make healthy choices the easiest choices. Settings refer to environments where people live, learn, work & play, such as schools, hospitals, workplaces and cities.



### Alcohol and the night-time economy

- A vibrant night-time economy plays a crucial role in not only sustainable growth, but also by making a positive contribution to Welsh life and culture. Night-time economies are a valuable asset to Wales. However, growth in the night-time economy has been associated with increasing levels of anti-social behaviour, unintentional behaviour, accident and emergency admissions, criminal activity and substance misuse<sup>13</sup>. There is a balance needed to retain the economic benefits but reduce the costs imposed by irresponsible drinking.

- Research was undertaken on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on young people's perceptions and use of the nightlife environment and drinking behaviours within North Wales. The methodology of the research included a scoping review, focus groups and surveys<sup>13</sup>.

Findings suggested that although patterns of alcohol use were mixed, there was some evidence of a trend towards young people consuming more alcohol during the Covid-19 pandemic than before, particularly binge drinking. In the focus group, when prompted to discuss alcohol-related harms within nightlife, the health issues related to the misuse of alcohol were not discussed. Instead, young people largely felt that some of the most problematic areas of nightlife were related to drugs and violence victimisation, whether it be the safety issues related to drug use within nightlife, witnessing or experiencing spiking, or witnessing and experiencing sexual violence<sup>13</sup>.



### Alcohol and the workplace

- Alcohol misuse increases the risk of injury, absenteeism, poor performance and unemployment<sup>15</sup> and is a significant cause of low productivity. A number of studies indicate that drinking can impair people's performance at work<sup>14</sup>. Research amongst North Wales residents during the Covid-19 pandemic suggested that working from home and reduced travel to attend the workplace increased alcohol consumption<sup>15</sup>.



### Alcohol and Schools

- In Wales, there were 912 pupils excluded from school for a fixed-term of any length due to drug and alcohol use in 2022/23 (10.2% of fixed-term exclusions for any reason). This is an increase from the pre-pandemic data of 463 pupils excluded from school for a fixed-term in 2019/20 (3.3% of fixed-term exclusions for any reason)<sup>16</sup>.



## Drink Driving

- There is strong evidence of a direct relationship between the amount of alcohol consumed and the ability to drive safely. Young people aged 20-24 are more likely to be involved in alcohol-related road collisions, with 19 collisions per 100,000 driving licence holders compared to 6 per 100,000 licence holders aged 50-59 years<sup>17</sup>.
- In Wales, in 2021, 320 people were killed on the roads where a driver was over the alcohol limit, this is a decrease from 550 in 2011<sup>18</sup>.

## What has been achieved so far?

- ✓ **The Best Bar None (BBN)**<sup>19</sup> scheme currently operating in Wrexham and Conwy is a national scheme to improve safety in licensed premises and reduce alcohol-related violence. The APB have provided funding for the ongoing delivery of the BBN scheme.
- ✓ The APB led a multi-agency learning event on **alcohol in the workplace** which culminated in the launch of the **Very Brief Interventions tool**. The training features within the Workforce Development programme delivered by Adferiad<sup>20</sup>.
- ✓ **Street Pastors**<sup>21</sup> work in the night time economy across the region offering a friendly, caring and non-judgmental assistance to vulnerable people within the night time economy
- ✓ **'Hafan y Dref'**<sup>22</sup> welfare centre in Wrexham provides a safe space where people who have become vulnerable due to consuming too much alcohol or taking drugs, can receive medical attention and support. The centre received funding from the APB.
- ✓ All counties across North Wales have received funding since 2020/1 from the Home Office for the **'Safer Streets'**<sup>23</sup> initiative to improve public safety and feelings of safety. Interventions include preventing violence against women and girls in public, neighbourhood crime and anti-social behaviour.
- ✓ The **Drink and Drug Driving** campaign led by North Wales Police targets those driving whilst under the influence.
- ✓ **School policies for Substance Misuse** are in place across North Wales and provide a clear reference for teachers, families and pupils to identify where support is available and how schools respond to particular situations when they occur.



## What will we do differently?

- Continue to work with Licensing Authorities to ensure Licensing Policies reflect and are supportive of the priorities of the Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy.
- Evaluate the Best Bar None initiative in improving standards in the night time economy.
- Link with the Community Safety Partnerships where prevention of alcohol related violence is included in delivery plans.
- Support all workplaces (public and private) to promote safer drinking (recommended units), develop an alcohol-free policy during working hours and develop a supportive culture with links to support services and promotion of mutual aid.
- Work with educational leads to attain the highest minimal standards for educational settings in relation to alcohol across the region.
- Seek out good/best practice and ensure, where appropriate, that it is replicated/rolled out across the region.

## Priority 2

### Changed attitudes and social norms

We will increase knowledge and understanding of alcohol related harms and enable people in North Wales to have a positive relationship with alcohol and work towards a culture in which non-drinking or a low level of alcohol consumption is valued and accepted as a norm.

#### What do we know?

Trends in alcohol consumption constantly change. They are influenced by many different factors: age, gender, socio-economic status, cultural beliefs, social and peer pressure and where people live. How alcohol is marketed, its availability and legislation also influence people's attitudes towards drinking<sup>24</sup>.

In Wales, around 17% of people do not drink at all, a figure which is increasing, particularly among young people<sup>25</sup>. In general, higher earners are more likely to drink alcohol than those on lower incomes, although those in more deprived circumstances are more likely to experience serious alcohol harms. The older generations are more likely to drink regularly. Men are more likely to binge drink than women, apart from in the younger age groups, where women and men are equally likely to binge drink<sup>24</sup>. There is also some evidence that binge drinking may be increasing in younger age groups<sup>13</sup>.

Most of the alcohol sold in the UK is bought by people who drink heavily. The very heaviest drinkers, who make just 4% of the UK population, consume around 30% of all the alcohol sold. About a quarter of profits made by the alcohol industry arise from these very heavy drinkers<sup>24</sup>.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, changes were viewed in people's attitudes towards alcohol, when drinking at home became more of a social norm. In 2020 there was greater access to alcohol purchased online, many people temporarily increased their alcohol use at home as a means of coping with mental health issues such as stress and loneliness<sup>13</sup>.



#### Adults:

Across Wales there is **higher prevalence of drinking above guidelines in males**, it is double that of females, in addition, **a quarter of adults** across Wales aged 45-64 years drink above guidelines.

In 2022-23, the rate of alcohol specific admissions to hospital in Local Authority areas across North Wales ranged from 253 per 100,000 persons in Anglesey, to 386 per 100,000 in Denbighshire. Gwynedd, Anglesey, and Wrexham were the only Local Authority areas in North Wales that have seen an increase in hospital admission rates due to alcohol-specific conditions since 2018-19<sup>7</sup>.

**There is a higher rate of alcohol related hospital admissions for those living in areas of deprivation.** The proportion of all patients admitted for alcohol specific conditions who lived in the 10 per cent most deprived areas was 2.9 times higher than those from the least deprived areas<sup>7</sup>.



#### Awareness of risks:

Many people who choose to drink alcohol are aware that drinking alcohol carries a number of risks, both in terms of what it can do to a person's body and in terms of the risks associated with being drunk.



### Parents as a positive influence on their children's attitudes to alcohol

The family is an important influence on children's views about normal and acceptable drinking. Young people who have parents/carers with less restrictive attitudes towards their alcohol use are more likely to start drinking alcohol than their peers. They are also more likely to drink and get drunk more frequently<sup>26</sup>.



### Schools and colleges include alcohol education in the curriculum

Schools and colleges have an important role to play in helping children and young people consider the harmful consequences of alcohol. NICE recommends a whole school approach to alcohol including alcohol education in the curriculum<sup>27</sup>.



### Alcohol industry marketing is regulated

Despite clear evidence to show the harm from alcohol, commercial companies continue to promote alcohol products to boost sales<sup>28</sup>. Expanding their customer base and encouraging existing customers to buy more, means that younger drinkers in particular are targeted, providing significant profits for the alcohol companies in the future<sup>29, 30, 31</sup>.

The marketing strategies used by the alcohol industry serve to distort messaging around the evidence of the harm that alcohol can do, for example suggesting that alcohol problems are confined to a small minority of drinkers, whereas robust evidence shows that there is a risk to health from alcohol across all types of drinkers. The social, mental and physical harms associated with drinking alcohol are actually attributable to both heavy drinkers and moderate drinkers<sup>28, 29, 30, 31</sup>.

## What has been achieved so far?

- ✓ **Drink Less Enjoy More** is a multi-agency harm reduction project in Wrexham addressing binge drinking among young people, with a focus on reducing preloading. It involved training to young people and door staff, test purchasing and a public awareness campaign.
- ✓ **Research was undertaken on the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on young people's perceptions and use of the nightlife environment and drinking behaviours within North Wales.** Findings suggested that the Covid-19 pandemic had adverse effects on mental health and wellbeing of young people, and resulted in changes in young people's drinking habits<sup>13</sup>.
- ✓ Healthy Working Wales is delivered by Public Health Wales and provides a range of **digital resources** for employers to focus on health and wellbeing including substance misuse<sup>32</sup>.
- ✓ **Research** into **alcohol harm** across North Wales was commissioned by the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) Public Health Team during the Covid-19 pandemic led to the production of insights for specific audience groups on their attitudes and behaviours related to alcohol<sup>15</sup>.
- ✓ Preventative information is delivered to all primary schools across North Wales through the **Don't Touch – Tell programme** funded by the APB, delivered by Adferiad<sup>33</sup>.
- ✓ **Adferiad** produce an annual 'Workforce Development programme'<sup>20</sup> funded by the APB providing free courses for those wanting to increase their knowledge and skills on a range of topics including alcohol.



## What will we do differently?

- Challenge the cultural norm of drinking alcohol, highlighting the role of the social environment in normalising drinking alcohol and making it difficult for others to change their consumption behaviours.
- Deliver initiatives aimed at reducing preloading and serving alcohol to people who have drunk excessively.
- Promote the availability of training to bar staff and door staff to enable them to effectively recognise the signs of vulnerability and how to support affected individuals.
- Make it as easy as possible for residents to obtain information relating to alcohol harm and reduction support services, minimising their efforts to find this.
- Promote strategies to parents and carers that will contribute to minimising harm to their children and promote social norms and positive attitudes around alcohol that contribute to their healthy and safe development.
- Promotion of alcohol-free drinks and development of dry bar events.
- Advocate for tighter regulation of alcohol advertising at a national level.

## Priority 3

### Reduced Availability

We will reduce alcohol related crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour by preventing and tackling alcohol related offending by individuals and irresponsible alcohol retailing.

We will ensure that robust and appropriate licensing policy is in place and compliance is tested.

### What do we know?

Work focussed on the following areas has been proven to be successful in reducing alcohol related harms:

- Fewer areas with a high density of outlets selling alcohol
- There are limits on the opening hours of outlets selling alcohol
- Robust and appropriate statements of licensing policy are in place
- Alcohol is not available for children aged 17 and under



#### Density of Licensed Premises

Evidence shows that areas with a high concentration of outlets selling alcohol are associated with higher and more frequent levels of alcohol consumption, violence, injuries, road traffic crashes, disorder, sexually transmitted infections, child abuse and suicides<sup>34</sup>. Areas of high deprivation are more likely to have high outlet density and this may contribute to health inequalities. There is evidence that limiting opening hours, and particularly late-night opening hours of outlets selling alcohol reduces alcohol related harm. Research in England shows that there is a marked relationship between alcohol availability in local areas and hospital admissions<sup>35</sup>.



#### Alcohol & Licensing policy

An effective licensing process is an important mechanism to control the availability of alcohol and minimise related harm. Local Best Bar None<sup>19</sup> and Pubwatch<sup>36</sup> schemes have been implemented throughout the region with the aim of achieving a safer drinking environment in all licensed premises throughout the UK.



#### Alcohol and Children

Drinking under the age of 18 is associated with increased risk taking, health harming behaviour and a range of social, health and educational problems. Parents are one of the main sources of alcohol for under-age drinking, and other common ways that children obtain alcohol are from friends, or to ask someone else to buy it. Developments in new technologies and social media also makes alcohol available beyond an average teenager's normal peer group<sup>26</sup>.





## Alcohol and Violence

In North Wales around 10% of violence offences against another person happen when the offender is under the influence of alcohol. This percentage has remained relatively stable since 2022. Of this group, between around 4% and 6% of offences occurs when the offender is the partner or ex-partner of the victim.

In 2024, there were 24,586 crimes of violence against a person in North Wales<sup>37</sup>, in around 38% of these crimes, the offender was perceived to be under the influence of alcohol<sup>18</sup>.

## What has been achieved so far?

- ✓ Organisations across North Wales have responded to the Serious Violence Duty by coming together to produce the '**North Wales Without Violence**' Strategy (2024)<sup>38</sup>. Alcohol intoxication is often associated with aggressive and violent behaviour<sup>43</sup>.
- ✓ An improved **data** environment to respond to alcohol related violence. Sharing data and information between organisation such as Emergency Departments and Police reduces costs associated with violence.
- ✓ **Test Purchasing** is managed by a memorandum of understanding with local policing and licensing authorities within each Local Authority across North Wales; for example, within one month Wrexham County Borough Council have undertaken 8 underage test purchases with 2 failures for alcohol.
- ✓ The density of **licensed premises** is managed by responsible authorities under the Licensing Act 2003.
- ✓ The Restorative Justice programme is led by the Public Protection officers in Wrexham County Borough Council and responds to those that purchase/or facilitate the purchase of alcohol by **fake or borrowed ID**. The system provides positive support to licensees and their staff and deters the use of false ID. It also seeks to improve compliance with underage drinking law and provides a single point of contact to reduce police involvement. There were 67 forms of identification collected during 2024 with a value of £1,802.



## What will we do differently?

- Work to ensure that sufficient resources are in place so that the law on underage sales is effectively enforced.
- Support the delivery of the 'North Wales without Violence'<sup>39</sup> Strategy where prevention of alcohol related violence is referenced.
- Produce information for the hospitality industry on arranging alcohol free events and information for participants on staying alcohol free.
- Consider substance misuse treatment providers attending large events to promote awareness and education about substance misuse and encourage engagement with treatment where needed.
- Work with Public Health Wales to update the 'Guide to Public Health and Alcohol Licensing in Wales'<sup>40</sup>.

## Priority 4

### Reduced affordability

We will assist Welsh Government and Local Authorities to ensure that alcohol is not available at a very low cost per unit of alcohol.

#### What do we know?



Wales introduced minimum unit pricing (MUP) of alcohol to 50p in 2020. The formula for calculating the MUP is designed to target high-alcohol content drinks, which tend to be consumed by those who are more at risk of alcohol harms<sup>41</sup>. Initial evidence from October 2020 found that 10% of drinkers had reduced their alcohol consumption. The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, however, has meant that understanding the effects of MUP on alcohol consumption is challenging<sup>42</sup>.

#### What has been achieved so far?

- ✓ MUP forms an important part of Welsh Government's overall Strategy for reducing alcohol-related harm, due to its ability to target the habits of those individuals who are most likely to suffer illness and death; and those people who drink at hazardous and harmful levels, including young people. It is designed to target alcohol products, which are sold at very low prices relative to their alcohol content.
- ✓ The effect of the Covid-19 pandemic has created difficulties in understanding the influence of MUP specifically on drinking habits, because of the many changes as a result of the lockdowns associated with Covid-19 pandemic<sup>42</sup>. Currently, there is some evidence of a positive effect of MUP on drinking habits in Wales<sup>43</sup>.



#### What will we do differently?

- Work with Welsh Government and Local Authorities to ensure that appropriate **monitoring and evaluation** remains in place to understand how MUP is working and what changes may be indicated, including elsewhere in the system.
- Support Local Authorities in the **enforcement** of MUP<sup>43</sup>.

## Priority 5

### Support for behaviour change

We will improve individual's health and well-being through promoting healthier choices, the provision of early help to those wanting to change and effective alcohol recovery services for those who need them.

#### What do we know?



In **North Wales 16%** of adults were drinking above the weekly guidelines in 2022-2023, which is lower than the Welsh average of 17.2%. Most local authority areas in Wales have seen a reduction in the percentage of adults drinking above the weekly guidelines since 2017, except for **Flintshire which has seen a rise from 16.7% in 2017 to 20.4% in 2023<sup>9</sup>**.



Since 2021, the Welsh Health Survey has measured levels of 'harmful' drinking, showing that around **3% of drinkers consume more than 50 units** of alcohol every week. This percentage has remained stable since 2021 when the data was first collected<sup>9</sup>.

The National Survey for Wales in 2019-20 highlighted that **13.4% of drinkers in Wales reported very heavy binge drinking** on the heaviest day of the previous week. This is a decrease from the 2017 figure of 19%<sup>9</sup>.



The alcohol specific mortality rate in Wales for 2021 was **15 per 100,000**, a rise from 12.5 per 100,000 in 2015. Compared with the pre Covid-19 pandemic period, alcohol-specific death rates have risen in all four UK countries. This is likely due to changes in alcohol behaviour during the pandemic, particularly among heavier drinkers, and the fact that alcoholic liver disease typically takes many years to develop<sup>25</sup>.

Alcohol specific mortality per 100,000 during the 2020-2022 period in North Wales was **highest in Conwy (16.4)** and **lowest in Gwynedd (11.7)**. All areas of North Wales have seen an increase in rates since 2017, except for Flintshire where rates have remained similar. The sharpest increase is in Conwy which has risen from 11.7 per 100,000 to 16.4 per 100,000<sup>25</sup>.



**The Covid-19 pandemic** has had an impact on drinking behaviour. Surveys suggest that although most people did not change their drinking habits in the long-term as a result of the pandemic, those who already consumed alcohol at higher levels were more likely to have increased their drinking, and sustained that increase post-pandemic<sup>44</sup>.



**Males aged 55-64** had the highest levels of drinking in Wales in 2022-23, with 32% drinking above 14 units of alcohol in a usual week, compared to females aged 55 – 64, 14% of whom drink above 14 units of alcohol a week<sup>45</sup>.

## What has been achieved so far?

- ✓ Support to stop or reduce alcohol intake is available across North Wales; **DAN 24/7** is the Wales drug and alcohol helpline providing free phone and online alcohol support 24 hrs a day 7 days a week. Resources are available to raise awareness of DAN 24/7. BCUHB's **Substance Misuse Service** provides confidential, non-judgemental, professional and accessible support which aims to reduce the harm caused by alcohol.
- ✓ **iCAN Mental health** provides easy to access support on various issues that may cause worry or affect mental well-being. iCAN hubs are available in all six local authority areas along with iCAN Primary care in GP surgeries across North Wales.
- ✓ **'Rethinking Our Drinking'** provides all year around messaging on the BCUHB website and social media platforms<sup>46</sup>. The APB funded data and insight to develop targeted educational messages to enable people to accurately assess their drinking patterns (including units consumed) during Alcohol Awareness Week.
- ✓ **'Dry January'** is the one-month alcohol free challenge run by Alcohol Change UK.
- ✓ **'Blue Light' training** courses led by Alcohol Change UK are funded by the APB. The training helps develop new skills to work more effectively with those drinking at harmful levels.
- ✓ **BCU HB Substance Misuse** deliver an integrated criminal justice substance misuse provision across the six counties of North Wales as well as within the regions three main Custody Suites. The project offers brief interventions, community mutual aid signposting, group work programmes and recovery workbooks.

Multiple mutual aid and peer led groups across North Wales, including:

- ✓ **North Wales Recovery Community:** based on the concept of mutual aid, individuals are supported to develop the positive support network and social capital necessary to develop meaningful lives, breaking the cycle of substance use, offending and homelessness.
- ✓ **Cyfle Cymru** peer mentors across North Wales help people to develop confidence, and provide support to access training, qualifications, and work experience. Helping people affected by substance misuse and/or mental health conditions to gain the skills necessary to enter the world of work.
- ✓ **Champions House** (Wrexham) is a supportive environment for people seeking help to recover. Offers support from a local recovery network for anyone who is looking towards a future without addiction.
- ✓ The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) identify and build relationships with local drug & alcohol treatment providers, mutual aid groups and peer-led services and help them understand any changes in benefit rules or provide them with **jobcentre practice**. They encourage customers who disclose substance use issues to seek support through a local network of providers. Service users are able to apply for a 6-month drug & alcohol conditionality easement for those in structured recovery treatment.



## What will we do differently?

- Review current brief intervention programmes, identify areas trained, numbers of staff trained, gain insight into barriers and facilitators to inform future planning of programme delivery e.g. supporting staff to be released for training.
- Review evidence and statistics to identify specific areas in which the brief intervention programme would be beneficial and target those area e.g. brief advice in primary care is cost effective.
- Work jointly with partners to ensure referral pathways to alcohol treatment are clear and develop a 'no wrong door' system. Ensure all agencies are able to support any individual requiring alcohol assistance by giving up to date information, accurate and relevant advice and signposting to the most appropriate agency for that individual.
- Monitor and review alcohol treatment and alcohol liaison service to ensure robust and comprehensive service delivery across North Wales.
- Launch Phase 2 of the Alcohol Very Brief Intervention training.
- Support the Alcohol Related Brain Damage (ARBD) pathway focussing on awareness, education and training.
- Ensure that the 'Ask and Act' initiative is implemented and delivered in North Wales cognisant of alcohol frequently being a causative factor in domestic abuse and sexual violence. Ensure that where alcohol related domestic abuse is identified there are processes / services in place which seek to address the issue.
- Establish Alcohol Conditional Bail – in cases of more serious alcohol related offences, for example assault and drink driving.
- Alcohol Treatment Requirements (ATR) – used for offenders with severe alcohol misuse or dependency who are at high-risk of re-offending because of their alcohol use.
- Review utilisation of resources and support of DAN 24/7 to better raise awareness of the impacts of alcohol.



## Priority 6

### Children, Young People and Families

We will protect children, young people and families from alcohol related harm and support them to achieve better outcomes through early identification, safeguarding and interventions.

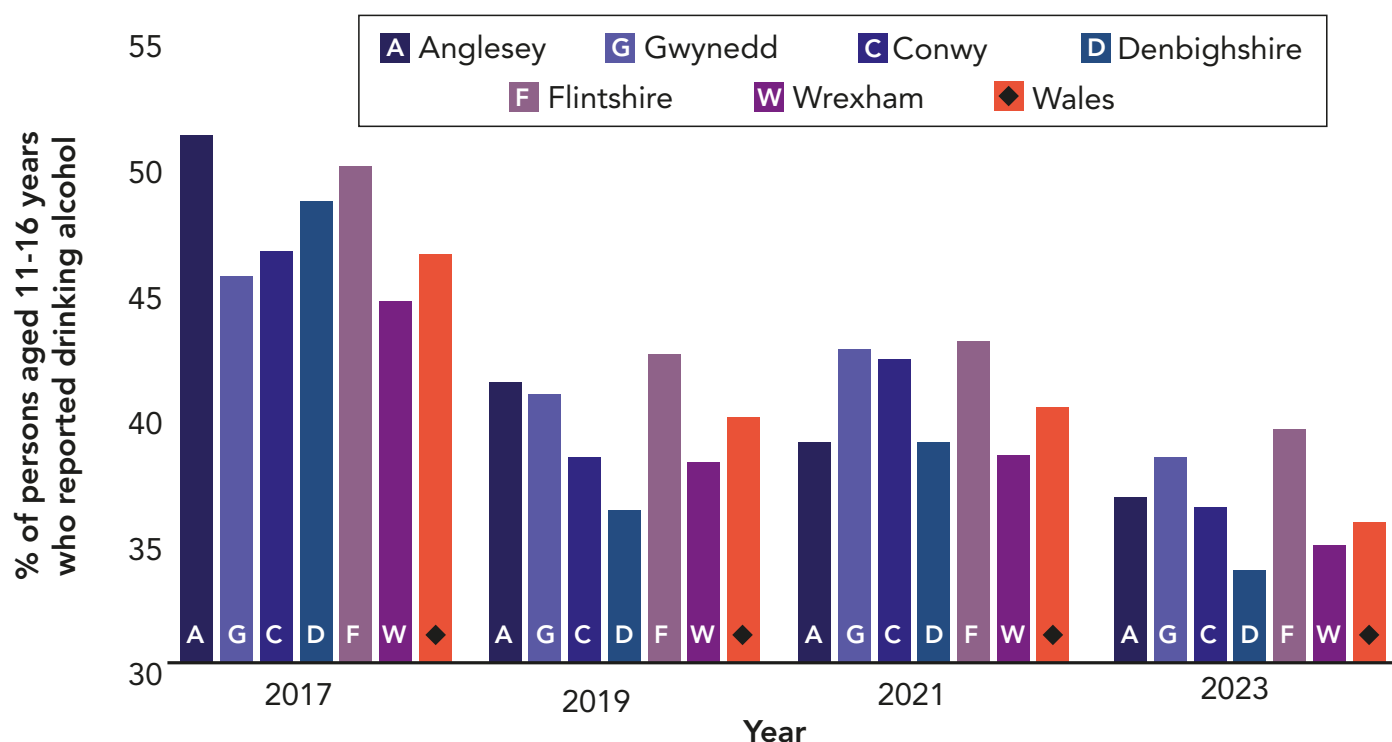
#### What do we know?

13.2% of referrals to the BCUHB Substance Misuse Midwife in 2024/5 were related to the harms associated with alcohol, and referrals have doubled during 2024-5<sup>47</sup>. The UK has one of the highest international rates of drinking alcohol during pregnancy, which translates to one of the highest prevalence rates of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) and other child-related developmental and behavioural problems<sup>48</sup>. The Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists (2018) highlight the safest approach is not to drink alcohol at all if you are pregnant, or thinking about becoming pregnant or breastfeeding<sup>49</sup> as it can affect the baby's development, growth and long-term health<sup>50</sup>.

Children develop an awareness of alcohol at an early age through social media, television, advertising, and their home environments and by age five have already formed basic attitudes and opinions about alcohol. Factors that influence young people's alcohol use include: curiosity, the need for acceptance and belonging, peer pressure, urge to rebel, boredom, copying habits they see in their environment (home, peer groups, community) and as a coping mechanism and a confidence boost<sup>51</sup>.

Table 4 shows a gradual reduction in the percentage of children who report drinking alcohol. Aged 11-16 year olds between 2017-2023 can be viewed in all Local Authority areas across North Wales.

**Table 4 - Persons aged 11-16 years who reported drinking alcohol, percentage, North Wales Local Authority areas<sup>7</sup>**





A higher prevalence of alcohol use is found amongst vulnerable groups including those who: are in contact with Young Offender Teams, have mental health problems, receive care or support, have carers or families who misuse substances, are not in education, employment or training and school excludees<sup>51</sup>.

In Wales, alcohol specific admissions to hospital for under 25s have declined by 68.7% over the last 10 years, from 1280 admissions in 2012-13 to 401 admissions in 2022-23. 50% of the admissions in 2022-23 were males.

Research shows that parental alcohol misuse can have a considerable negative effect on children, young people and the family. Regular heavy drinking reduces the time and resource that parents are able to spend with their children and alcohol misuse is often a factor in cases of child abuse and neglect<sup>52</sup>. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are stressful events occurring during childhood, which can include growing up in a household in which alcohol misuse is present. ACEs can have a detrimental impact on health across the life course, contributing to increased health inequalities and mortality<sup>52</sup>. The Covid-19 pandemic greatly affected the mental wellbeing of many young people, and although the links remain unclear, several studies have suggested that this has resulted in greater reliance on alcohol, or an increase in binge drinking among some young people<sup>53, 54</sup>.

## What has been achieved so far?

- ✔ A range of initiatives delivered through Local Authority departments, which support children, young people and families with alcohol related problems such as **Flying Start** and **Integrated Family Support Service**.
- ✔ **Pre-conception care** offered to women in BCUHB.
- ✔ ACE Hub Wales has been working with the Substance misuse sector to adopt the **TrACE (Trauma & Adverse Childhood Experience) informed** organisations toolkit.
- ✔ **Research** was undertaken with pregnant women and parents across North Wales including an online survey and telephone interviews. Key insights were gained which related to their attitudes and behaviours relating to alcohol, and engaging with these groups to develop messages on alcohol harm.
- ✔ The '**Best Start' hub**<sup>55</sup> provides useful information, advice and support for families during the stages of planning pregnancy through to a baby's early years and beyond.
- ✔ **Alcohol awareness sessions** take place in primary and secondary schools as part of a comprehensive substance misuse programme, delivered by the 'All Wales School Liaison Core Programme', the Healthy Schools' Team and In2Change substance misuse team.
- ✔ The APB commissions substance misuse services across North Wales to Children, Young People and Families: **Wrexham In2change and Inspire, Flintshire Sorted, Barnardo's in Conwy and Denbighshire and Be di'r Sgor in Gwynedd and Anglesey**. The services provided are universal, prevention, early intervention as well as structured treatment services and specialist support treatment to young people identified as having substance misuse issues. A survey has been developed to gather views of young people's experience of the services to inform improvement.
- ✔ The APB has commissioned **Familial Services** in each county seeking to reduce the negative impact of parental substance misuse and reduce the risk of young carers becoming involved in substance misuse themselves.



- ✓ The North Wales **Families Affected by Imprisonment (FABI)** programme is funded by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for North Wales. The programme works jointly with multi-agency professionals for families, children and young people.
- ✓ A commissioned service between Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and District General Hospitals providing assessments and interventions for young people with substance misuse issues presenting at each of the three District General Hospitals in North Wales. Ensuring follow up and intervention on discharge.
- ✓ The North Wales Substance Misuse **Workforce Development programme**<sup>20</sup>, delivered by the Adferiad Learning and development team is commissioned by the APB. The programme offers a range of courses addressing substance use and mental health issues for Youth Services, teachers and other young-person-facing services to raise awareness of issues and signposting.



## What will we do differently?

- Continue to support the role of the Specialist Substance Misuse Midwife providing specialist care and advice to pregnant women with substance misuse problems including alcohol.
- Develop a Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder awareness and educational campaign for health professionals and the general public to raise awareness of the impact of alcohol on unborn babies. Establish selective preventative strategies aimed at women of childbearing age.
- Review the School Health Research Network (SHRN) data on alcohol consumption and support the production of resources to deliver the Welsh Network of Healthy School scheme.
- Review utilisation of resources and support of DAN 24/7 to better raise awareness of the impacts of alcohol.
- Consider the findings of the research undertaken on the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on young people's perceptions and use of the nightlife environment and drinking behaviours within North Wales; including binge drinking and safety issues including sexual violence and assaults.
- Adferiad will produce a 'Bitesize' training video on alcohol related issues for a range of professionals working with young people; particularly those working in District General Hospitals.
- Raise awareness with parents of the harmful effects of alcohol for children under the age of 18 years.
- Arrange a Best Practice forum to support the development of alcohol resources / interventions to be used by Children and Young People and Practitioners.
- Explore the provision of Tier 4 Inpatient Services for young people requiring detox or rehabilitation support.
- Engage and listen to the voice of children and young people to inform the development of preventative measures with respect to alcohol use.
- Ensure that the impact of alcohol on the lives of excluded young people feature as part of intervention programmes.
- Develop a drug and alcohol diversion scheme via a regional Out of Court policy.

# Implementation of the Strategy

This Strategy identifies actions that will rebalance the relationship that the population of North Wales has with alcohol. In order to affect that change and cultural shift to a place where non-drinking or a low level of alcohol consumption is valued and accepted as a norm, thereby reducing the harms associated with alcohol consumption, engagement across a range of bodies is required, which include:

- Primary Care
- Health Board
- Local Authorities
- Police and Criminal Justice System
- Educational services and Services for Young People
- Hospitality/Leisure and retail outlets and other settings which sell alcohol
- Housing sector
- Third sector

Local partnerships already exist which can form a focus for reducing the harms caused by alcohol misuse and are excellent examples of good practice. There is a need to build on that to create a better coordinated and multiagency collaborative approach to reducing alcohol related harm in North Wales. A strategic approach to communications needs to be adopted to ensure effective sharing of information, data and good practice across harm reduction initiatives in the region.

This Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy sets the foundation for the development of the APB Action Plan for tackling the impacts of alcohol misuse in North Wales over the next 5 years.

There needs to be links between national policy, regional and local area work. Delivery at the regional and local level must retain the flexibility to meet local priorities whilst operating under the overarching Strategy objectives of reducing harm. Local partnerships need to be able to tailor their approach to meet their particular needs of their communities in line with the resources available.

More work needs to be undertaken in the early identification of those that are engaged in hazardous and harmful drinking and their subsequent transition to support networks to reduce the harms of alcohol.

A clear framework of directional indicators to work towards and monitoring arrangements needs to be developed, allowing measurement of progress toward the overarching objective of reducing harm.

There needs to be engagement with partners and the public in relationship to Minimum Unit Pricing to improve understanding and support continued lobbying for its introduction and implementation in the future.



# Performance Indicators



## Priority 1: Safe and supportive environments

Indicators:

- Alcohol-related recorded crime.
- Alcohol-related violent crime.
- Alcohol-related sexual crime.
- Reduction in Drink-Driving offences.
- Children excluded from school due to drug and alcohol use.
- Screened breath tests in Wales by police force area.
- Mortality on the road due to alcohol.
- Motoring offences in court due to alcohol.



## Priority 2: Changed attitudes and social norms

Indicators:

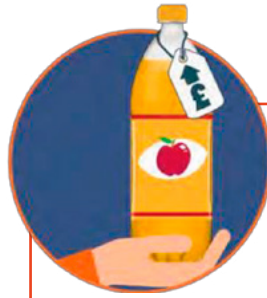
- Accident and emergency attendances for alcohol.
- Proportion of adolescents using alcohol.
- Proportion of adults drinking above guidelines.
- Under-18 alcohol-specific hospital admissions.
- Alcohol-specific hospital admissions (working age adults 18-64).
- Alcohol-specific hospital admissions (older adults 65+).



## Priority 3: Reduced availability

Indicator:

- No specific indicators for reduced availability but above indicators will be proxy measures.



## Priority 4: Reduced affordability

Indicator:

- No specific indicators for reduced affordability but other indicators on this page will be proxy measures.



## Priority 5: Support for behaviour change

Indicators:

- Proportion of adults drinking hazardously.
- Proportion of adults drinking harmfully.
- Number of people in treatment where alcohol was identified as their primary substance.
- Alcohol-related deaths.
- Reduction in alcohol related liver disease.
- Presentations for substance misuse treatment (alcohol).
- Successful completion of substance misuse treatment (alcohol).
- Adults in substance misuse treatment who successfully engage in community based structured treatment following release from prison.



## Priority 6: Children, Young People and Families

Indicators:

- Reported cases of domestic abuse associated with alcohol misuse.
- Under-18 alcohol-specific hospital admissions.
- Children in care because of parental drinking.
- Children in care who have issues with drinking

## APB Members

- Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board; Director of Public Health, Planning representative and Clinical representative
- North Wales APB team
- Each Local Authority covered by the APB; Isle of Anglesey County Council, Gwynedd County Council, Conwy County Borough Council, Denbighshire County Council, Flintshire County Council, Wrexham County Borough Council
- North Wales Police
- Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner
- HMP Berwyn
- Probation Service
- Supporting People / Homelessness / Housing representative
- CANIAD
- Adferiad
- Welsh Government

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