

14 ways you can help prevent cancer



Recommendation 6 for Policy-makers on Alcohol

- Increase prices of alcohol through taxation to make alcohol less affordable.
- Establish a minimum price for all alcoholic beverages.
- Restrict the availability and accessibility of all alcoholic beverages.
- Ensure that no alcoholic beverages are offered in any public catering services.
- Increase minimum legal age limits to at least 19 years for selling and serving all alcoholic beverages.
- Ban or restrict advertising, promotion and sponsorship of all alcoholic beverages in all media and for all purposes, especially those targeting minors.
- Facilitate access to screening, brief interventions and treatment of alcohol use disorder in primary care and community settings.
- Introduce health warning labels related to alcohol consumption and nutritional labelling on all alcoholic beverages.
- Complementing the above policy measures, implement regular public health campaigns to raise awareness of the detrimental effects of alcohol intake on health and its association with cancer risk.

Executive summary

The consumption of alcoholic beverages has been identified as a risk factor for more than 200 diseases and injury conditions. Drinking alcoholic beverages has been strongly associated with the development of cancer. The risks are highest for cancers of the oral cavity, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus, and liver. The risks are also elevated for common cancer types, such as breast cancer and colorectal cancer. There is no safe level for the consumption of alcoholic beverages, and the risk is increased even at the lowest consumption levels. For the prevention of cancer, zero alcohol consumption is recommended.

Based on annual per capita consumption data from the World Health Organization (WHO), the average consumption of alcohol among people who drink alcohol aged 15 years and older in the European Union (EU) generally exceeds the maximum low-risk consumption limits set by health authorities. In 2021, almost 210 000 deaths and almost 6.8 million disability-adjusted life years¹ were estimated to be attributable to high alcohol consumption in the EU. Of these, more than 57 000 deaths were due to cancer.

Numerous policy recommendations have been issued to reduce alcohol-related harm, and several EU Member States have already implemented effective action plans and initiatives to reduce the disease and economic burden related to the consumption of alcohol. Integrated policy approaches that address alcohol consumption and leads to its denormalization include taxation, age restrictions, regulating marketing and advertising, and interventions in primary care and community settings leads to reducing the associated cancer risk and burden. This policy brief describes international policies and guidelines that support policy-makers and other stakeholders to implement the European Code Against Cancer, 5th edition (ECAC5) policy recommendations to address the cancer burden caused by alcohol.

¹ One disability-adjusted life year (DALY) equals the loss of the equivalent of one year of full health.

Key policy actions to reduce alcohol consumption

- Increase prices of alcohol through taxation, and establish a minimum price for all alcoholic beverages.
 - Increasing alcoholic beverage excise taxes is a powerful and cost-effective measure to reduce the consumption of alcohol. Currently, taxation is applied on alcoholic beverages throughout the EU. Establishing a domestic taxation system accompanied by an effective enforcement system for all alcoholic

beverages could increase the effectiveness of such measures.

- Restrict the availability and accessibility of all alcoholic beverages.
 - Implementation and enforcement of policies that restrict the availability and accessibility of all alcoholic beverages are among the most efficient and cost-effective in reducing alcohol-related harm. These policies include: licensing systems for the control, production, and sale of alcoholic beverages; limits for the location of sales of alcoholic beverages; restrictions in the operation of alcohol outlets (number and location of retail sales, days and hours of retail sales); and restrictions on drinking alcohol in public places.

- **Ensure that no alcoholic beverages are available in any public catering services.**
 - Setting standards for public catering services that ban alcoholic beverages from being served.
- **Increase minimum legal age limits to at least 19 years for selling and serving all alcoholic beverages.**
 - Establishing an appropriate minimum age for purchasing alcohol is effective in reducing access to alcohol by young people by preventing alcohol sales to minors.
- **Ban or restrict advertising, promotion, and sponsorship of all alcoholic beverages in all media and for all purposes, especially those targeting minors.**
 - Bans or restrictions on alcohol advertising are cost-effective measures to reduce alcohol-related harm. They could be achieved by setting up regulatory frameworks that control the content and the volume of marketing, restrict sponsorship activities, and regulate the use of social media or other promotion activities that target young people.
- **Facilitate access to screening, brief interventions, and treatment in primary care and community settings.**
 - Work towards increasing the capacity of public health and social welfare systems to deliver prevention, treatment, and care related to alcohol consumption, including initiatives for screening and brief interventions for harmful and hazardous alcohol intake, and by providing universal access to treatment services, with a particular focus on sensitive population groups, such as pregnant women.
- **Introduce health warning labels related to alcohol consumption and nutritional labelling on all alcoholic beverages.**
 - Introducing labels that inform and warn the public about the detrimental health effects of alcoholic beverages is a cost-effective measure to prevent alcohol consumption and its related harm.

- **Implement public health campaigns to raise awareness of the detrimental effects of alcohol intake on health and its association with cancer risk.**
 - Launch high-quality evidence-based public health campaigns so that all population groups have access to understandable information about the effects of alcohol on health, and the need for and existence of measures to prevent these effects.

Risk of cancer

- There is strong evidence that consuming alcoholic beverages increases the risk of cancers of the liver, mouth, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus, and breast (premenopausal and postmenopausal).
- There is no safe level of consumption of alcoholic beverages for cancer prevention. The risk of developing cancer is increased even when alcohol consumption is low. To prevent cancer, it is better to not drink alcohol.



Monitoring progress

Policy-makers can monitor the progress and the effectiveness of the various measures by participating in the periodic rounds of data collection on alcohol consumption, and by establishing publicly funded alcohol research and monitoring programmes.

References

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