



Alcohol and Families Alliance: 2024 Policy Manifesto

The 2024 General Election is an important opportunity to reinforce the key priorities needed to tackle the harm caused to children and families by alcohol.

It is estimated that 4 million adults in the UK are negatively affected by the drinking of a family member or friendⁱ, whilst 3 million children in the UK are living with parental alcohol problemsⁱⁱ.

These children and families will face a range of challenges throughout their lives because of their loved one's drinking, and this includes drinking at all levels, not just dependence. The challenges children and families face can include stress and anxiety, family conflict, isolation, trauma, stigma, mental and physical health problems, neglect, abuse, damaged relationships, financial strain and hardship, and bereavement. It's vital that those affected are given the recognition and support they need to overcome these challenges.

The Alcohol and Families Alliance is a network of over 50 voluntary and statutory organisations and individuals working across the substance misuse, children, and family sectors. We are united in campaigning for policy change to reduce the harms caused to children and families from alcohol.

Together we are setting out the top four priorities we want to bring to the attention of the next UK Government. To reduce the harm caused to children and families by alcohol, we propose investing in services for children and families, tackling the affordability, availability and promotion of alcohol, reducing stigma, and the development of a new alcohol strategy.

1. Investing in services for children and families affected by alcohol harm

Family support services are a vital component in any local support framework around substance use. The benefits of properly funded, targeted family support extend to both the person experiencing drug or alcohol problems, to enhance their chances of achieving and maintaining recovery, but also to family members themselves, to fulfil their own support needs and improve their wellbeing. This, in turn, helps the drinker to seek treatment and to recover.

The government's 10-year Drugs Strategy brought about much-needed investment for frontline services providing drug and alcohol treatment in communities across the country, along with fresh impetus and focus on this key issue. Whilst the Strategy acknowledges the impact of addiction on families, evidence shows that this funding is not filtering through to family support, an area which has not experienced an increase in fundingⁱⁱⁱ. As a result, support available to families continues to be sparse and many family members do not get the help they need.

The government has called on local authorities to utilise Drugs Strategy funding in supporting families^{iv} and interventions to help children of alcohol dependent parents.^v The Alcohol and Families Alliance welcomes these calls but would argue for this to be taken further and that specific outcomes relating to families are included in funding allocations given to local authorities for drug and alcohol treatment.



Children affected by parental drinking must not be excluded either, and The Alcohol and Families Alliance calls for the reintroduction of the Children of Alcohol Dependent Parents grant scheme, a dedicated national innovation fund to support children of alcohol dependent parents, including those whose parents are not currently in contact with treatment services. The previous grant round achieved successful outcomes for parents and children^{vi}.

2. Tackling the affordability, availability and promotion of alcohol

Population-based prevention policies addressing the affordability, promotion and availability of alcohol are proven and effective methods of reducing levels of alcohol consumption, thus tackling the harm caused by alcohol to children and families and bringing about positive change. These measures are formally endorsed by the World Health Organization in their Global Alcohol Action Plan^{vii}. They are also an important means of moving away from an environment and culture which focuses so heavily on, and normalises drinking, which in turn exposes children to alcohol meaning they are more likely to drink more at an earlier age and experience alcohol-related harm in later life. The Alcohol and Families Alliance therefore calls on the next government to:

- Protect children from exposure to alcohol advertising by introducing restrictions on alcohol advertising in the media.
- End alcohol sponsorship of professional sport.
- End the use of alcohol industry-funded education materials. Instead, introduce high quality, non-conflicted education around public health issues. Statutory alcohol education in schools should also include education about the effect of drinking on children and family members, and where they can access support.
- Ensure alcohol marketing regulations are overseen by an independent body with no links to the alcohol industry.
- Introduce an automatic uprating system that keeps alcohol duty in line with inflation year on year, using the revenue to fund frontline alcohol treatment and family services.
- Restrict the availability of retail alcohol through reduced hours of sale and reduced density of retail outlets.
- Explore the introduction of Minimum Unit Pricing in England, learning from the experiences in Scotland and Wales where MUP has been an effective mechanism of addressing alcohol affordability to tackle alcohol-related harm.

3. Putting an end to stigma

Stigma is an issue that has affected people struggling with their drinking or substance use and their families for many years. Stigma silences people and creates barriers to them talking about what they are going through and accessing support, which can lead to social isolation.

The stigma experienced by family members can come from a variety of sources, including close friends and family, colleagues, the media, frontline services and the wider public. It ultimately makes the experience of having a loved one with a substance use problem even more challenging than it already is.

Improving public awareness and understanding of this issue is essential to achieve a society free from stigma for people struggling with their drinking, and their families. In recent years considerable progress has been made with regards to mental health, partly as a result of public awareness campaigns which have improved people's understanding of mental health and encouraged people to have open and honest conversations about their experiences.

We should aspire for similar progress to be made with regards to alcohol people struggling with their drinking. The Alcohol and Families Alliance is therefore proposing a public awareness-raising campaign on this issue. This needs to happen alongside efforts to improve understanding amongst frontline services and professionals. It is vital to tackle taboos and create a society that shows empathy and compassion towards those affected by these issues.

4. A new alcohol strategy

Alcohol-related harm and dependence, in its widest sense, often gets ignored in favour of strategies and policies to combat illegal drug use. It's been over a decade since government's last alcohol strategy in 2012. A new, dedicated alcohol strategy, that includes the need to support and provide services for children and families, is much needed. This would demonstrate Government commitment around the harms caused to families by alcohol and work towards positive change.

ⁱ Adfam (2021): [Overlooked: Why we should be doing more to support families and friends affected by someone else's drinking, drug use or gambling.](#)

ⁱⁱ Nacoa (2023): [Research study on children in the UK living with parental alcohol problems](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Adfam (2023): [State of the Family Support Sector 2023](#)

^{iv} HM Government (2023): [Drugs: Government Response to the Home Affairs Committee's Third Report of Session 2022-23](#)

^v Department of Health and Social Care, Department for Work and Pensions, and Neil O'Brien MP (2023): [Press release: Helping kids and families living with alcohol-dependent parents](#)

^{vi} Department of Health and Social Care (2023) [Evaluation of the Children of Alcohol Dependent Parents programme innovation fund: full report](#)

^{vii} World Health Organization: [2022-2030 Global Alcohol Action Plan](#)