

The background of the entire page is a complex, abstract geometric composition. It features overlapping translucent shapes in shades of blue, yellow, and white. A large, stylized 'C&P' logo is overlaid in the center. The bottom right area contains a pattern of small white dots on a yellow background. The overall aesthetic is modern and professional.

AWARDS FOR
EXCELLENCE IN
**PUBLIC
RELATIONS**
2019

Best Public Affairs Campaign



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Campaign

Alcohol Health Alliance Public Health Alcohol Bill campaign

Description of Campaign

A public affairs campaign that provided evidence and experts from a wide range of sectors in support of the measures contained in the Public Health Alcohol Bill. Enacted in October 2018, it is the first piece of legislation to address the public health impact of alcohol consumption in Ireland



Organisation

Alcohol Health Alliance Ireland

Background to the Campaign

Alcohol Health Alliance Ireland (AHA) was established in March 2015 by the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland (RCPI) and Alcohol Action Ireland (AAI), to support the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill, a piece of legislation that has the potential to significantly reduce the harm caused by alcohol consumption in Ireland. It was the first public health lobby group to support the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill and includes over 50 members.

The Royal College of Physicians of Ireland is a postgraduate medical training and educational organisation that has a long tradition of advocating for public health. Its members work at the frontline of the health services, from the Emergency Department to hospital wards and outpatient clinics. Every day they see the often life-altering or fatal injuries caused by fights, falls, RTAs, alcohol poisoning and cancers that are caused by an unsafe consumption of alcohol across all sectors of Irish society.

From their experience with patients, doctors recognised that, in general, Irish people are unclear about what constitutes low-risk drinking and are unaware of the impact binge drinking or habitual drinking can have on their

overall health. For example, the evidence that links alcohol consumption with an increased risk of getting 7 cancers, including the two most common in Ireland, bowel cancer and breast cancer in women, were not well understood.

Alcohol Action Ireland is the national charity for alcohol-related issues. It is an independent voice for advocacy and policy change, working to reduce levels of alcohol harm in Ireland and improve public health, safety and wellbeing.

The AHAI set out to inform the public of the risk associated with drinking in an unsafe way to encourage them to make better choices that could help to save lives and reduce the harm and injury that is causing so much suffering to families and putting an unsustainable burden on the health services.

It set about communicating those messages to the public, politicians and policy-makers to encourage them to support, and understand the impact of this legislation and to inform public discussion around alcohol use and its impact on health and health services.

Statement of Objectives

A team from RCPI and AAI worked with our doctors and key spokespeople from AHAI member organisations to develop a public affairs campaign for engagement with the public, Government and other policy makers to support the enactment of the Public Health Alcohol Bill.

The Key objectives were:

- To clearly explain the evidence-based policy solutions contained within the legislation and how they could help to change behaviour and reduce harm.
- To brief Oireachtas members about the evidence to give context and statistics around the Bill's contents to tackle unhealthy alcohol consumption.
- To keep Oireachtas members up to date on any developments with our campaign and related events, i.e. press conferences.
- To consistently and effectively counter misleading claims being made by those opposing the legislation.
- To bring other groups and organisations together to advocate for these policies to show the scale of support for the Bill from wide swathes of civil society.
- To repeatedly call for the introduction of measures contained in the draft legislation, particularly the introduction of a minimum unit price on alcohol – an evidence-based measure that has reduced alcohol consumption in other countries. We also called for labels on alcohol products to show health harms, calorie counts and other information to help consumers to make informed decisions around these products.
- To draw on Irish and international evidence to seize media opportunities to highlight specific health risks associated with alcohol.
- To sustain a debate about alcohol use that was based on its impact on health and the health services.

Goals

- To urge the government to lead a change in our relationship with alcohol in Ireland for the health of the population, by introducing the Public Health (Alcohol) Act.
- To help to change the conversation and to encourage more discussion around alcohol to include the impact on people's health and the key health, social and economic benefits to reduce our alcohol intake.
- To communicate the low-risk guidance around alcohol use.
- To make the public aware of the extent of the pressure alcohol related illnesses and incidents are putting on an already stretched health service, particularly the Emergency Departments.

Programme Planning and Strategy

In 2012, RCPI convened an expert group to develop policies to reduce the harm and suffering caused to virtually every family and community as a result of alcohol use. It was chaired by RCPI Past-President, Prof Frank Murray, a liver specialist. This group's work formed the basis of this campaign.

Five of its members, Prof Murray, Prof Aiden McCormick, Dr Stephen Stewart, Dr Orla Crosbie and Prof Joe Barry volunteered as spokespeople to inform the public and policy makers about the impacts of alcohol on health to seek

to change the national conversation. They made themselves available alongside clinical commitments to participate in Oireachtas briefings, media interviews on national/local media and to speak at conferences to various audiences.

In 2013, Alcohol Action Ireland began its collaboration with RCPI. Partnership with RCPI enabled a wide range of Public Health advocates in the NGO community to coalesce under one united banner, and with a cohesive, powerful message, that Ireland's harmful relationship, which impacted on many facets of Ireland's socio-economic life, had to be urgently tackled as a matter of public policy.

Audience definition and profiling

Alcohol is a hot topic in Ireland where drinking is an intrinsic part of our culture and conviviality. We recognised that it would be challenging to effectively convey our key health messages and worked hard to shape the news agenda around alcohol.

In 2017, a powerful piece of research 'Ireland Thinks' was commissioned by AHAI with the core objective of strengthening the campaign by gauging public opinion around the components of the proposed legislation:

74% supported Government intervention to reduce alcohol consumption and to protect people from alcohol-related harm

A second opinion poll analysed the effects of alcohol marketing on young people:

78% are concerned about children and their exposure to alcohol

82% support Government action to curb alcohol marketing that appeals to young people

The first strand of this campaign involved working with our spokespeople to agree our key messages that would be based on series of facts and figures we gathered from a variety of sources.

Our key messages included:

- That 3 people die every day in Ireland as a result of alcohol use. This is more than are killed on our roads.
- That 65% of suicides related to excessive drinking.
- That 4 in 10 children in Ireland are at risk from being adversely affected by alcohol.
- That 1,500 hospital beds are occupied every night as a result of alcohol – a major issue when trying to access healthcare.
- The way we drink in Ireland is costing the State €3.7 billion a year in terms of providing healthcare, policing and social services – over €1 billion related to healthcare costs.
- Low risk guidance-recommendations (17 units of alcohol a week for men and 11 units for women).
- That alcohol is linked to 7 different cancers, including bowel cancer and breast cancer (2 most common in Ireland).

We then successfully created media opportunities to disseminate these messages to national, medical and local media including print, broadcast and online.

Techniques employed included:

- Placing spokespeople on national and local media around peak alcohol consumption times such as holidays, etc.
- Offering spokespeople to explain new and emerging evidence about health and alcohol.
- Providing experts to participate in debates on national and local media against lobbyists opposing the Bill.
- Holding briefings with experts, including doctors from Emergency Departments and liver units, to give first hand testimony of the harm they were seeing in the health service.
- Working with patients and families affected by alcohol use who told their stories and engaged with the media.

Engagement with Oireachtas members:

- We worked closely with the Oireachtas cross party group on alcohol chaired by Senator Frances Black to provide information at key points in debates in the Dáil and Seanad.
- We regularly issued briefing notes to all Oireachtas members and offered briefings with our doctors and other experts on this issue.

- We worked with MEP Brian Hayes to arrange a briefing with our experts at the European Commission in Brussels to highlight the issues in Ireland.
- We issued press releases to trigger conversations about alcohol that prompted media interviews with our spokespeople. This generated coverage across all media outlets in Ireland.
- We created and shared short videos with our experts hosted on our youtube and other social media channels to speak about the health risks associated with unsafe levels of alcohol consumption.
- Our spokespeople closely monitored new and emerging research in this area alerting us to new evidence or studies due to be published that would provide them with opportunities for commentary in the Irish media.

Throughout the campaign, we developed graphics, posters and other marketing materials to further promote our message and to highlight the delays to this legislation:

- We created graphics to mark ‘500 day’ and ‘900 day’ images – to raise awareness of the delay to the legislation and to indicate to policy-makers the level of harm to population health over this time period- e.g. 3 deaths per day due to alcohol in Ireland.
- A positive narrative piece (at 650 days delay mark) issued to all Oireachtas members (September 2017) .

Samples of opinion pieces

The Lancet Medical journal

Ireland’s Public Health Bill: crucial to reduce alcohol harm

Irish Times

The Irish Times view on the Alcohol Bill drinks lobby – <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/editorial/the-irish-times-view-on-the-alcohol-bill-drinks-lobby-pulls-out-all-the-stops-1.3642455>

- Our spokespeople were responded to tragic events or pressures created in the health services as a result of alcohol use that surfaced in the media. They also contributed regularly to radio shows with the biggest audiences on national and local radio, including *Morning Ireland*, *Today with Sean O’Rourke*, *The Pat Kenny Show* and *PrimeTime*, *Galway Bay FM*, *Tipp FM* and *Highland Radio*.
- We monitored the letters pages of the national and local newspapers and regularly contributed letters from our President Frank Murray and other spokespeople.
- We proactively responded to correct inaccurate information and to highlight the need for greater enforcement of drink driving legislation.

Measurement

This public affairs campaign played an integral role in the enactment of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act in October 2018 in the face of a well-resourced and multi-faceted campaign opposing it.

AHAI was recognised for its substantial contribution in the final Dáil debate by Minister for Health, Simon Harris when it was finally passed into law.

Our social media engagement using RCPI, Alcohol Action and an AHAI Twitter account provided us with a vital tool throughout our campaign and greatly increased our engagement with the public and policy-members and also AHAI member organisations, we capitalized on this with the use a dedicated hashtag to support our message, #PHABsaveslives

We were able to engage with key stakeholders such as Government ministers, senators and senior medical personnel who shared our messages and acknowledged the work of AHAI on the enactment of the legislation.

Examples:

Tony Holohan – Thanks to @AHA_IRL and all those who supported us on this important public health issue @HSELive @HealthyIreland @roinnslainte

AHAI – This morning the President signed the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill and it has accordingly become law. In time, this legislation will save lives and hopefully change our nation’s harmful relationship with alcohol, reduce consumption and lessen alcohol harms.

ChildrensRights.ie – Fantastic achievement that will help protect children & families. Well done to all who fought so hard for so long. Reducing the accessibility & affordability of alcohol will help reduce the amount of harm children are exposed to #PHABsaveslives

Simon Harris TD – Public Health Alcohol Bill is finished all stages in both Houses of the Oireachtas and now goes to the President to be signed into law #PHABsaveslives

Alcohol Health Alliance Ireland – Alcohol Health Alliance Ireland: David's Story (John Higgins video) >150K viewers – 61K YouTube; 62K Facebook; +21K Twitter (AHA) plus AAI accountbook; +21K Twitter (AHA) plus AAI account.



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