

# CHANGE

“Scots have always had a problem with alcohol – it’s the culture”



# CHANGE how we think

There is nothing fixed about Scotland's drinking culture. The way we buy and consume alcohol today is very different from what it was fifty years ago.

Understanding that culture can change will help us to take the action we need to reduce the harm caused by alcohol.

*Adults in Scotland are drinking nearly  
two litres more pure alcohol each year  
than people in England and Wales –  
11.8 litres per capita compared to 9.9 litres.*

**Nielson Company 2008**

# **CHANGE** how much we drink

In the 1950s the amount of alcohol drunk by the UK population in a year was around 5 litres of pure alcohol per adult.

By 2008, our consumption had more than doubled. Today in Scotland, one million men and women across all ages and social groups regularly drink at levels that could put their health at risk.

*Consumption of spirits in Scotland is almost  
double that for England and Wales –  
3.5 litres per capita compared to 1.8 litres.*

**Nielson Company 2008**

# CHANGE what we drink

In the 1950s drinking was a predominantly male activity and over 70% of the alcohol consumed was beer.

Today in Scotland, nearly 60% of the alcohol consumed is wine and spirits and many more women drink and drink more regularly than in the 1950s although men still make up the majority of drinkers.

*“In 1979, 50% of cirrhotic liver deaths were due to alcohol, today 85% of cirrhotic liver deaths are due to alcohol.”*

**Dr Alastair MacGilchrist, Consultant Hepatologist,  
Edinburgh Royal Infirmary**

# **CHANGE** deaths due to alcohol

In the 1950s Scotland had one of the lowest liver disease mortality rates in Western Europe. Today it has the highest.

The biggest increase in mortality has occurred since 1990. During this period, death rates for men have almost tripled. In the most deprived communities in Scotland death rates for men have increased by 500%.

*Ten leading supermarkets reported to a  
competition commission inquiry that  
they sold alcohol below cost.*

**Competition commission 2007**

# CHANGE where we drink

In the 1950s drinking was a pub-centred activity. Today in Scotland over half the alcohol sold is consumed at home.

Supermarkets dominate the off-licence trade selling more than two-thirds of wine and spirits. There are now more supermarkets than pubs in the UK and alcohol can be bought in many more places including corner shops and petrol stations.

*“Expansion of industrial production and marketing of alcohol is driving alcohol use to rise, both in emerging markets and in young people in mature alcohol markets.”*

Casswell, S and Thamarangsi, T (2009), Reducing harm from alcohol: call to action, the Lancet, vol 373

# CHANGE alcohol production

In the 1950s beer was a regional product and the beer sector in Scotland was made up of small and medium-sized Scottish-owned breweries.

Today the beer market is dominated by a handful of multinational companies and the same is true for whisky. Alcohol can now be produced at higher volumes and at a much lower unit cost.

*“There is extensive and consistent evidence  
that raising the price of alcohol reduces  
alcohol related harm.”*

**WHO, Regional Office for Europe, 2009**

# CHANGE cost of alcohol

Since the 1950s the real price of alcohol in the UK has fallen dramatically. Lower production costs and cheap supermarket alcohol combined with rising disposable incomes, has meant that alcohol today is 75% more affordable than 30 years ago.

The more affordable alcohol becomes, the more we drink, and the more harm we experience.

*“Alcohol marketing communications have a powerful effect on young people and are independently linked with the onset, amount and continuance of their drinking.”*

**Under the Influence: the damaging effect of alcohol marketing on young people. BMA 2009**

# **CHANGE** alcohol marketing

In the 1950s alcohol marketing was limited to mainly printed media. Today the alcohol industry in the UK spends around £800 million each year promoting brands and products through television, billboards, sponsorship, digital media and social networking sites.

*Seat belt laws, drink driving and  
smoke free legislation demonstrate how  
legislation and regulation can help bring  
about a change in culture.*

# **CHANGE** is possible

In the 1950s drink-driving was a common and widely accepted practice. Since legislation was introduced banning it, the incidence of drink-driving and the number of drink-drive fatalities has fallen significantly. The combination of legislation and enforcement supported by public awareness campaigns changed the drink drive culture.

*“Health is not a tradeable commodity....  
There needs to be public sector leadership in  
effective national and international regulation  
of products, activities, and conditions that  
damage health or lead to health inequalities.”*

**Closing the gap in a generation, WHO 2008**

# **CHANGE** make it happen

Buying and consuming alcohol has changed significantly since the 1950s. Some changes are related to societal shifts but the alcohol market itself drives culture change. The developments that have occurred in the market are relatively recent and can be reversed.

Controls on the price, availability and marketing of alcohol will change consumption and harm.

# SHAAP

SCOTTISH HEALTH ACTION ON ALCOHOL PROBLEMS

SHAAP was established by the Scottish Medical Royal Colleges and Faculties to raise awareness about the burden of harm caused by alcohol and to advocate for effective, evidence-based policy measures to reduce this harm.

[www.shaap.org.uk](http://www.shaap.org.uk)



**SUPPORTCHANGE**

[www.shaap.org.uk](http://www.shaap.org.uk)