

Life Chances for All- supporting groups affected by alcohol harm

The Alcohol Health Alliance is working hard to ensure that the government's forthcoming Life Chances Strategy will benefit all disadvantaged groups, including those suffering adverse consequences from alcohol, who make up a significant proportion of those needing support.

The AHA is asking Parliamentarians to draw attention to this issue and write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the Rt Hon Damien Green MP, to seek assurance that alcohol will be included in the Life Chances Strategy in order to reduce alcohol related harm and alcohol dependency.

Background

In January 2016, the Life chances strategy was announced, stating an ambition to **'transform the life chances of the poorest in our country and offer every child who has had a difficult start the promise of a brighter future.'** It is welcome news Prime Minister, Theresa May, has stated that improving life chances will be at the heart of the new Government

In March 2016 the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Education recently produced a memorandum on the life chances strategy for an inquiry run by the work and pensions select committee. This fully acknowledged the impact of alcohol on life chances. It stated that:

We also know that drug and alcohol addiction has a significant impact on families and on children's life chances. Parents who are dependent on drugs and alcohol clearly present real risks to the health, safety, and life chances of children. It is estimated that there are between 250,000 and 350,000 children affected by drug misusers. Around 6% (700,000) of children live with a dependent drinker. Drug and alcohol use may be associated with risk factors for low birth weight of term babies. Whilst there is currently no data on how many children in the UK are affected by foetal alcohol spectrum disorder it is clear that pre-natal exposure to both drugs and alcohol can have real impacts including growth deficiencies and problems with central nervous system functioning.ⁱ

Alcohol and negative life chances

Having a parent who misuses alcohol can seriously harm the life chances of a child. Research has found that more than half (52%) of parents receiving treatment said they were unable to provide children with the support they needed due to their alcohol use, with 47% saying that their focus was on alcohol not parentingⁱⁱ.

Alcohol is implicated in 25-33% of child abuse cases,ⁱⁱⁱ and more than 4,000 children per year contact ChildLine with concerns about their parents' drinking, which is the most frequent worry children have about their parents when they call.^{iv}

The Office of the Children's Commissioner has also stated that 'different levels of consumption (not just parents who are dependent drinkers) and particular styles of drinking (such as binge drinking) may affect children and it cannot be assumed that higher levels of consumption equates to greater harm'.^v

The Joseph Roundtree Foundation's recent report 'Counting the cost of UK poverty' identified both alcohol and drug addiction as key factors contributing to poverty in the UK. They show that 41% of all addiction treatment comes from the most deprived 20% of neighborhoods, while less than 3% comes from the least deprived. They also calculate that 85.7% of addiction service usage can be attributed to poverty,^{vi} strongly highlighting the case for alcohol measures to be included in the Life Chances

About the Alcohol Health Alliance (AHA)

The AHA is a group of 46 organisations whose mission is to reduce the damage caused to health by alcohol misuse. Our members include royal medical colleges, charities and alcohol health campaigners. For more information or support in doing so, please contact Laura McLeod Policy & Advocacy Manager at the Alcohol Health Alliance. lmcleod@alcoholconcern.org.uk or 0203 815 9830.

ⁱ [DWP and DfE memorandum for the work and pensions select committee](#)

ⁱⁱ Bottling it Up: The Next Generation, Turning Point, 2011

ⁱⁱⁱ Strategy Unit (2004), *Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for England*, London, Cabinet Office

^{iv} [ChildLine Case Notes](#), 2010

^v [Silent Voices](#), 2012

^{vi} Bramley. G., Hirsch. D., Littlewood. M., Watkins. D., (August 2016) Counting the cost of UK poverty, Joseph Roundtree Foundation