



13/08/2025

Deputy Rice  
Dáil Éireann,  
Leinster House  
Dublin 2

**PQ Ref 41310/25 To ask the Minister for Health if she will provide an update on the progress of each individual action outlined in the 2022 HSE position paper on the prevention of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder; and if she will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy Rice,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

The HSE Alcohol Programme established a Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) Expert Advisory Group in September 2020, a multidisciplinary group, to support the HSE Alcohol Programme work on FASD prevention. This Expert Advisory Group developed the HSE's Position Paper on the Prevention of FASD, which was endorsed by HSE's Executive Management Team, the Quality and Safety Committee of the HSE Board, the RCPI Faculties of Public Health and Paediatrics, and the Institute of Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

The following table provides an update on each of the 14 individual actions in the position paper.

Action	Update
<b>1. Advocate for development of a whole of government national strategy on FASD.</b>	The need for a whole of government approach to the response to FASD continues to be highlighted by the HSE.
<b>2. Support implementation of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 in full (provisions on the Content of Advertising, broadcast watershed, and the provision of health warnings on all alcohol product labels are yet to be enacted).</b>	<p>The HSE's National Environmental Health Service has produced a range of guidance documents to support implementation of provisions in the Public Health (Alcohol) Act (PHAA) 2018, which are available on the HSE website: <a href="https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/environ/">https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/environ/</a></p> <p>In September 2022, the HSE Alcohol Programme made a submission to the European Commission's consultation on Ireland's health information labels on alcohol products in support of their introduction (European Commission Notification Number: 2022/0441/IRL - Title: Notification of Draft Regulations Under Section 12 of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018).</p>

	<p>The HSE is a member of the Technical Evaluation Group on the Public Health Alcohol Act, which is supporting the evaluation of measures in the PHAA.</p>
<p><b>3. Advise Government on further development of legislation and regulations in order to reduce the accessibility, availability and affordability of alcohol in line with the WHO SAFER initiative and the WHO Global Action Plan on Alcohol</b></p>	<p>The HSE Alcohol Programme has made submissions in support of the development of alcohol legislation and regulations to the following public consultations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report on Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Sale of Alcohol Bill 2022 - March 2023</li> <li>• Coimisiún na Meán public consultation on Ireland's first Online Safety Code –January 2024</li> </ul> <p>These submissions outline evidence-based recommendations for regulation of 0.0% alcohol products and reducing the accessibility and availability of alcohol.</p> <p>In addition, the HSE is supporting the implementation of the Building SAFER Communities, a national initiative led by the Alcohol Forum Ireland and funded by the Department of Health. The initiative is implementing the WHO's five cost-effective policy actions aimed at reducing alcohol-related harm across 12 communities in Ireland.</p>
<p><b>4. Strengthen the HSE's alcohol and pregnancy communications campaign with the public and healthcare professionals so that there is sufficient exposure to consistent and clear messaging that no amount of alcohol at any stage of pregnancy is safe</b></p>	<p>The HSE delivers an ongoing communications campaign to encourage pregnant women, and women planning a pregnancy, to have an alcohol-free pregnancy. The HSE undertook market research in 2024 to analyse attitudes towards alcohol use in pregnancy amongst the adult population of Ireland, and inform the improvement of communication resources. This included a nationally representative surveys with 1,000 adults and the results indicated that opinions have not changed much since 2018, with more than 1 in 5 people believing it is okay for women to drink during pregnancy, particularly light/moderate alcohol use.</p> <p>The HSE also conducted a literature review to identify international evidence-based communications approaches. The findings highlighted the need for an integrated approach with policy reforms like health information labels and clinical supports within services.</p> <p>The findings are currently being used to create an improved communications campaign on prenatal alcohol use. HSE Communications have contracted a creative agency to support this work, who have commenced the development of the campaign. New creative messaging and visuals will be tested and reviewed by the public, including a lived experience reference group, and is due to be completed and launched in Q4 2025.</p> <p>The HSE has also conducted a number of webinars and podcasts (HSE Talking Health and Wellbeing Podcast) on alcohol and pregnancy for both the public and healthcare professionals. In addition, posters, leaflets and communication toolkits have been developed and disseminated with staff across maternity and primary care services.</p>

<p><b>5. Implement training in alcohol screening and brief intervention (SBI) nationally to health and social care professionals via the MECC (Making Every Contact Count) and SAOR (Support, Ask and Assess, Offer Assistance, Refer) initiatives.</b></p>	<p>The Making Every Contact Count (MECC) programme is a national health behaviour change programme, developed by the HSE in 2017. The MECC programme works with health professionals to ensure they have the capability to deliver brief interventions and advice to all patients regarding the key risk factors for chronic disease, including alcohol. As part of the Sláintecare Healthy Communities programme, there are currently nine MECC leads nationwide to support the implementation of MECC.</p> <p>The MECC training programme includes standardised training through blended learning. Training includes eLearning and an ‘Enhancing Your Skills’ workshop, which are available to all healthcare professionals in Ireland. In 2024, a total of 2,371 completed MECC eLearning, with 1,338 completing the ‘Enhancing Your Skills’ workshop. A Training for Trainers (T4T) workshop was held in September 2024, which added 22 trainers to the 100+ pool of existing trainers to deliver the ‘Enhancing Your Skills’ workshops.</p> <p>SAOR Screening and Brief Intervention for Problem Alcohol and Substance Use (O’Shea, Goff &amp; Armstrong, 2017) is a step-by-step guide for practice developed in response to problem alcohol and other drug use. SAOR training was developed to support the delivery of the intervention and is delivered using a blended learning approach. Learners complete a short eLearning module on HSEland in advance of a 1-day skills practice workshop. SAOR training is available to any staff in any service or group who have occasion to ask people about their drug and alcohol use in a diverse range of settings. This can include community-based drugs services, child and family services, homeless agencies, family support, employment support, vocational training, criminal justice, probation, primary care services, third level colleges and sporting organisations.</p> <p>In 2024, a total of 1,386 learners successfully completed SAOR eLearning. A total of 843 learners were reported to have completed the 1-day SAOR skills-based training in 2024, however this figure may be underreported.</p>
<p><b>6. Ensure all maternity services adopt and implement the HSE Making Every Contact Count (MECC) maternity module.</b></p>	<p>A total of 9 MECC workshops were conducted across three maternity hospitals maternity services between 2022 and 2024.</p>
<p><b>7. Develop and roll out an alcohol digital intervention akin to the <a href="http://www.quit.ie">www.quit.ie</a> intervention for tobacco</b></p>	<p>The HSE has partnered with a Belgian charity, De Druglijn, to develop an online personalised self-help tool for substance use. The tool was finalized in early 2025 and aims to support individuals to reduce their alcohol and/or drug use through evidence-based behavioural change techniques, interactive exercises and support. An application has been made by the HSE Alcohol Programme to the Sláintecare Integration and Innovation Fund 2025 to deliver a project to implement the tool with a sample of the Irish population and specific target groups and to evaluate its implementation and outcomes. The project also seeks to</p>

	plan the future integration of successful components of the tool into the HSE Digital Application Roadmap and Infrastructure for 2028.
<b>8. Develop the role of Drug and Alcohol Liaison Midwives to enhance the provision of evidence-informed alcohol interventions with pregnant women and their families.</b>	The HSE Drug and Alcohol Liaison Midwives are represented on the FASD Prevention Expert Advisory Group. They also meet as a national group, convened by the Director of Nursing in the HSE's National Social Inclusion Office. The group continues to be actively engaged in FASD prevention work, including the delivery of local training on prenatal alcohol exposure and the delivery of support services with pregnant women and their families.
<b>9. Expand the availability of Drug and Alcohol Liaison Midwifery Services, with access to the full range of services for patient support (e.g. detoxification) in pregnancy, as recommended by the national Maternity Strategy and Drug and Alcohol Strategy.</b>	There is currently one Drug and Alcohol Liaison Midwife located in each Integrated Healthcare Area (IHA) to ensure treatment pathways exist for pregnant women. The Cuan Dara service is a 10 bedded addiction treatment unit which has a National remit and currently provides inpatient treatment for pregnant women who require treatment. The Cuan Dara service is in the process of expanding to a 23 bedded inpatient unit (1st October) in order to meet current service need in for this cohort in particular.
<b>10. Expand alcohol services for pregnant and post-natal women and develop pathways of care; in line with the strategic priorities for implementation of the National Drug and Alcohol Strategy</b>	More generally, alcohol services have been enhanced in a number of regions since 2022 with the establishment of Integrated Alcohol Services in Galway, Mayo, the Midwest (Limerick, Clare, and North Tipperary), North County Dublin and Cork. In addition, a further 22 posts for community-based alcohol services have been identified in the HSE National Service Plan for 2025 and will be recruited in the coming months.
<b>11. Undertake a training needs analysis to ascertain training needs specific to alcohol and FASD prevention for all staff, and use the findings to develop and implement an FASD awareness-raising campaign and professional development plan for healthcare staff</b>	<p>In 2022, the HSE undertook a survey of Irish healthcare, social care, and education professionals' knowledge, attitudes and experience of FASD. There were 702 valid responses. A majority of respondents worked in health care with 69% (485) health care staff, 15% (102) social care and 11% (74) from education. The vast majority of respondents were aware of guidance on drinking in pregnancy (94%) and correctly identified 'no alcohol' as the guidance (96%). However 26% did not agree that the guidance is clear and understandable. A little more than a half of GP (52%) and midwife (54%) respondents routinely ask women of childbearing age about alcohol, with 40% of obstetricians reporting doing so. Over 86% of respondents expressed an interest in future training on FASD.</p> <p>In 2023, a series of videos were produced and disseminated with staff showcasing alcohol brief interventions in action with pregnant women and are available on the HSE Health and Wellbeing YouTube channel.</p> <p>A communications toolkit for healthcare professionals was created in 2024 to support healthcare professionals in promoting alcohol free pregnancies, with a range of communication resources including digital and print media resources (social media posts, poster, leaflet, podcast).</p>

	A standardised training programme and resource pack are currently in development for healthcare professionals aimed at upskilling healthcare professionals on understanding and preventing prenatal alcohol exposure with patients, service users and the general public.
<b>12. Increase provision of effective universal and targeted parenting supports during pregnancy and the early years, in line with 'Supporting Parents: A National Model of Parenting Support Services'.</b>	Through the delivery of the Sláintecare Healthy Communities (SHC) Programme, parenting programmes are delivered with families with children aged 0-12 years which aim to engage families and children with greater needs (e.g. living in a disadvantaged areas), but do not meet the current threshold for support and therapeutic intervention. In 2024, 160 parenting workshops commenced with 1,406 individuals engaged and a total of 125 parenting group courses were commenced with 986 individuals enrolled across the Sláintecare Healthy Communities areas.
<b>13. Develop a model of care for child neurodevelopmental disorders to include FASD. As part of the model of care, adopt the International Classification of Function , a validated tool for standard needs assessment, and provide interventions and supports to children and adults with FASD</b>	<p>In June and November 2024, workshops were held with key stakeholders from across public health, maternity, primary care, mental health, disability, and social inclusion services to explore how learning from Scotland could inform the development of the HSE's response to prenatal alcohol exposure in Ireland. The Fetal Alcohol Advisory Support and Training Team (FAASTT) at the University of Edinburgh are funded by Scottish Government and have a national remit to provide and facilitate training, consultation and research in order to enhance the capacity, knowledge and confidence of Scotland's health and social care workforce in their work with those affected by FASD. At these workshops, FAASTT shared their learning in developing training, research and services for FASD.</p> <p>The HSE is currently exploring how a single neurodevelopmental pathway to include FASD could be implemented in Ireland, and how a scalable and sustainable model for building capacity of Ireland's health and social care workforce to work with those affected by FASD can be built. A workshop is planned for September 2025 with HSE Clinical Design and Innovation to agree next steps.</p>
<b>14. Explore potential for screening and appropriate surveillance of cases of FASD</b>	A proposal was submitted to the Department of Health for the introduction of population based screening of alcohol in pregnancy.

If you require any further information or clarification, please do contact us.

Yours sincerely,

Aisling Sheehan  
National Lead HSE Alcohol and Mental Health and Wellbeing Programmes, Health and Wellbeing