

Quaker Action on Alcohol & Drugs



Unleashing hope

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'Every child's right': An Alcohol-free Childhood Campaign in Scotland

Last year, the Scottish government commissioned Public Health Scotland to carry out a review of evidence to inform its future decisions about restricting alcohol marketing. The report stated: *'alcohol marketing and advertising is pervasive and persuasive, and frequent exposure to it drives alcohol consumption and related harms, including among children and young people'*. Restricting alcohol advertising and marketing, it concluded, would be an effective and cost-effective way to reducing consumption.

Younger Scots have also expressed their concerns. In 2019, members of Scotland's Children's Parliament (aged 9-11) called for adverts to be removed and for alcohol to be less visible in shops; a year later, the Young Scot Health Panel (aged 14-25) recommended that alcohol marketing, including adverts on TV, in cinemas, and in public spaces should come under mandatory control.

In response, Alcohol Focus Scotland, BMA Scotland, Children in Scotland, Scottish Families affected by Alcohol and Drugs, and Scottish Health Action on Alcohol launched the Alcohol-Free Childhood campaign. It calls for an end to the harmful impacts of alcohol marketing on Scotland's children and young people:

'Alcohol marketing leads children and young people to start drinking earlier, to drink more, and to drink at problematic levels. We need to do more to prevent this.'

According to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *'the marketing of alcohol to children can have a long-term impact on their health, affecting their right to life, survival*

and development.' Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Scottish government has a legal duty to uphold every child's right to *'the highest attainable standard of health'*. The campaign argues that protecting children and young people from alcohol marketing is a vital part of fulfilling this duty.

To date, over 60 organisations and more than 80 MSPs across Holyrood have pledged their support, including the First Minister, John Swinney MSP, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, Neil Gray MSP, and the Minister for Alcohol and Drugs Policy and Sport, Maree Todd MSP.

Full details about the campaign can be found at: www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk/Alcohol-Free-Childhood

Research: Alcohol and Loneliness

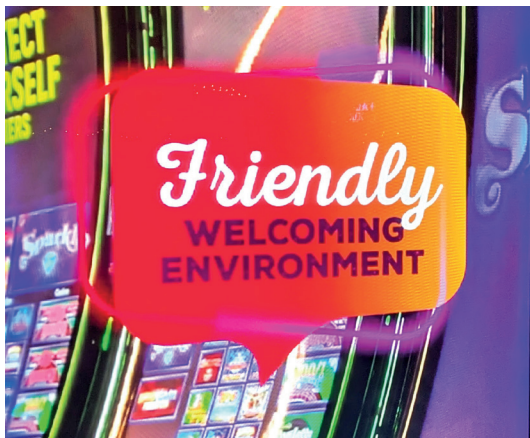
A new US study, published in *Nature Neuroscience*¹, suggests that loneliness can reprogram the brain in ways that stimulate alcohol consumption. For the first time, scientists identified a brain mechanism through which isolation escalates alcohol use in male mice - but suppresses it in females. The report's lead author, Reesha Patel PhD, said: *'These findings provide a much clearer biological target for understanding and eventually treating alcohol misuse that arises from isolation, a problem that is becoming increasingly common.'* The authors conclude that further research is needed to explore why males and females respond so differently to isolation, and how these findings translate to humans.

¹ <https://news.feinberg.northwestern.edu/2026/08/25/loneliness-rewires-the-brain-to-drive-alcohol-consumption-mouse-study-finds/>



The end of 'Aim to Permit'

For twenty years, the Aim to Permit rule in the Gambling Act 2005 has restricted local authorities' powers to prevent the opening of high street gambling establishments, even when local people have voiced strong objections. In August, the government announced that it will repeal the rule in England, Wales and Scotland from the beginning of 2027¹. Measures will also be introduced to address the proliferation of vape shops and 'rogue operators' with their links to crime and antisocial behaviour. In England, Adult Gaming Centres (AGCs)² and vape shops will also be required to apply for planning permission for the first time.



In January, Andy Burnham, as Greater Manchester mayor, joined nearly 300 politicians and campaigners calling for the rule to be abolished. Keir Starmer stopped short of this, but did introduce changes in April which gave councils more scope to consider how many premises were already open in their area and their cumulative effect.

Announcing the decision, the Prime Minister highlighted the 'hollowing out' of traditional high streets: *'The rise of vape shops, betting shops, and rogue operators have replaced*

shops, services, and community spaces that people are crying out for... We're putting communities back in control and giving local people a real say over what opens on their high street. Local councils will be given the powers they need to reign in unwanted shops...'

What is Aim to Permit?

A licensing condition which 'places a legal duty [on local authorities] to aim to permit gambling, insofar as it is considered to be reasonably consistent with the pursuit of the licensing objectives...' These are: preventing crime and disorder; fair and open conduct; and protecting the vulnerable.

The Gambling Commission's guidance says: *'The effect of this duty is that...authorities must approach their functions in a way that seeks to regulate gambling by using their powers... rather than starting out to prevent it altogether.'*

What has been its impact?

Aim to Permit has resulted in clusters of betting shops and AGCs, particularly in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the country. According to the Gambling Commission, there were 8,234 gambling establishments on UK high streets in March 2025³, including 5,825 betting shops and 1,415 AGCs. The London Borough of Brent, for example, has over 80 gambling outlets, including 10 within a 10-minute walk in Harlesden. This is in spite of a large public petition which tried to stop new premises being granted a licence. Typically, when local authorities attempt to block new applications, gambling companies will employ top legal teams to contest this in court, making fighting such cases financially prohibitive for councils on tight budgets.



Response

QAAD has supported the abolition of Aim to Permit in our responses to several government consultations on gambling reform. Its abolition is a very welcome step in the right direction, although because it will only apply to future licence applications, it will not reduce the number of existing gambling venues.

'It will make a real, tangible difference to people's lives.'

Dawn Butler MP (Lab Brent East), a prominent campaigner on the issue, said: *'Our high streets should work for local people – not for companies profiting from harm. No longer should residents feel powerless when they see changes on their doorstep. That is why scrapping Aim to Permit matters: it will make a real, tangible difference to people's lives.'* East Midlands mayor, Claire Ward agreed: *'Local powers given to locally accountable councils, together with investment led by regional mayors, will help diverse high streets to flourish.'*

Jamie Gollings, The Social Market Foundation's deputy research director - and lead author of its 2025 report 'High Streets at Stakes' - said: *'Our research made clear that these venues are proliferating in the poorest communities, are linked to anti-social behaviour, and often fail the basic tests of fairness and harm prevention set out in the Gambling Act itself.'* Nearly half (44%) of 14-17 year olds who responded to the research survey confirmed that having gambling venues close to home *'makes people their age more interested in gambling.'*

The Betting and Gaming Council (the industry body for betting and gaming) agreed that local people should have a *'proper say over their high streets'*, whilst pointing out that 3,000 betting shops have closed since 2019.

¹ Northern Ireland has its own gambling legislation and will not be affected by this decision

² Adult-only venues offering 24-hour access to electronic gambling machines

³ A 1% reduction on the previous year. The total in 2011 was 12,207

* News * News * News

Ketamine: The Drugs Research Network for Scotland, funded by the Scottish government, has analysed police seizure data for ketamine between 2018-2024. It found that there had been a six-fold increase in the number of seizures during this period, concentrated in Greater Glasgow, Edinburgh and the North East regions. The researchers highlighted the lack of reliable and easy-to-use drug checking tests as a key area of concern. On average, 30% of samples seized contained other substances as well as ketamine, significantly increasing risks for people using the drug.

The report's recommendations included the need to use the data to identify high-risk locations and changes in supply patterns; improving the sharing of information between the police and health services to support harm reduction activities; and developing new drug checking methods. It also stressed the importance of working with schools, youth services and community groups to help raise awareness about ketamine use and trends.



Unleashed Community Drama – building confidence, community and hope

Here, a Friend writes about Unleashed, a Christian theatre company and charit, and its Community Drama group, for which she volunteers. The latter was specifically created for local people who have experienced homelessness or are in recovery.

Unleashed Community Drama grew out of Unleashed Theatre Company, a Christian theatre company based in Torquay. This was established in the early 2000s to bring Christians from



different churches together to create thought-provoking, professional-standard productions with a clear message of hope. As the Company's reputation and

membership grew, it was commissioned by the Abbot of Buckfast Abbey to produce and perform several large-scale shows there, including *Godspell*, *A Man for All Seasons*, and *Shadowlands*. Now a registered charity, Unleashed continues to develop creative social-action projects, including Unleashed Community Drama and Unleashed Community Choir, both of which are free of charge, with no audition or firm commitment required.

Although open to everyone, Community Drama was specifically created for people who have experienced homelessness or are in recovery from addiction. It runs for 51 weeks of the year, providing a regular, positive and welcoming place for people to gather, away from the pressures they may be facing in their everyday lives. The group provides a supportive, welcoming and affirming environment where members can build confidence, develop self-worth and discover their performance skills. One of the longstanding members describes their journey:

'I came at the beginning of my recovery, I had been diagnosed with non-military PTSD, I wouldn't go anywhere, I wouldn't be in any sort of group....it's given me such a boost, I feel like a completely different person'.

Another, a drug user for 20 years, was recommended to Unleashed by his support worker:

'When I come into drama initially... I was really feared up, it took me about two months of just sitting and watching. It was a really big part of bringing me out of myself and building my confidence.'

Community Choir places a strong emphasis on the benefits of singing for mental wellbeing, creating an opportunity for people to come together, make music, and experience the positive effects of being part of a supportive community.

At the end of the Covid lockdowns, members of Unleashed Community Drama took to the hills around Torquay to film *The Rich and The Pure* — their first film. It was an exploration of austerity in 1840s Torquay, a town that was then one of England's wealthiest resorts. As with all Unleashed productions, the film was created collectively, with the group involved in developing the story and script, and all members who wished to participate playing a part on screen. *The Rich and The Pure* was nominated for Best Film at the London Short Awards in 2021 and won Best Screenplay at the 2022 Cannes Short Film Awards.



In 2023, Community Drama produced its second film, *Three Steps*, specifically focusing on homelessness and

addiction. The film explores the idea that we can all be just three steps away from homelessness, and how quickly our circumstances can change, regardless of our background.

Torquay and the wider Torbay area face high levels of homelessness that consistently exceed the national and regional averages for England. Torbay also struggles with a high volume of hospital admissions directly related to chronic alcohol misuse and the film wanted to directly address the many complex scenarios that can lead to individuals being in this position. *Three Steps* was filmed around Torquay and made creative use of the local landscape, with the beaches at Bantam standing in for Afghanistan. The film is available to watch free of charge on the YouTube.¹ There you will also find a short

documentary about the making of the film.²

This summer, the Theatre Company produced *Crosslight*, a new production exploring the events of Holy Saturday — the day between the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The production continues Unleashed's tradition of using theatre to explore Christian themes and will be toured locally in Easter 2027.

Next year, Unleashed will launch the Learning Zone, a selection of low cost-courses for those who have negative experiences of formal education. The charity has already completed two Performing Arts courses and a specialised Shakespeare course, which included members of the Community Drama group.

At the heart of everything Unleashed does is a simple message: that creativity can build confidence, community and hope — and that everyone has a story worth hearing.

Further information about Unleashed can be found on its website:

www.unleashedtheatrecompany.com

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KjoQ4HFoZjM>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbddSvBm0hI>

'City of Harm Reduction'

Bristol: In July, Bristol was formally declared a 'city of harm reduction' by Green councillors, who lead the council, supported by Labour and Liberal Democrat members. In doing so, they have pledged to focus on supporting rather than punishing users of illegal drugs, stressing the need for public health, rather than criminal justice, approaches to tackling the UK's drug problems. Councillors hope that the declaration will put pressure on the government to review national drug policy and lead to the establishment of a legal drug consumption facility in the city, similar to the first, the Thistle in Glasgow.

Cllr Cara Lavan (Green), whose partner died following a drug overdose, said: *'It's not encouraging people to use drugs, but it's about making sure that if they are going to use [them], they're not being stigmatised and criminalised.'* Her colleague Cllr Abdul Malik, stressed that Islam advises people to avoid harmful substances and that the declaration is not in conflict with this position. However, he said, *'We cannot honestly say prohibition on its own has solved this problem and we have a responsibility to look at what the evidence tells us does work.'* Cllr Kaz Self (Labour) said that whilst her party had supported the declaration, there was also concern that this could be the *'thin edge of the wedge.'*



News: Alcohol

‘Addictive products...addictive platforms... addictive devices’:

The Institute of Alcohol Studies has made a short film, ‘Digital Intoxication: Online Alcohol Marketing Explained’¹, which shines fresh light on how the alcohol industry has permeated social media platforms to promote its products and brands, including to children and young people: *‘You have addictive products – alcohol, tobacco, gambling - being marketed inside addictive platforms on additive devices to billions of people.’*

The film shows how online content frequently evades current regulations and provides a ‘frictionless’ path to online purchasing and home deliveries, particularly focusing on drinkers buying large quantities online. Of greatest concern is how children and young people are being targeted through gaming and e-sports channels, and via online influencers’ posts.

It highlights the complexity of reigning in the multi-national, often hidden activities the industry uses to protect its commercial interests. The world’s six largest alcohol companies alone spent \$17.7bn on marketing in 2017, the majority of which was digital. *‘Just as with tobacco, a global and comprehensive approach is required’*. It concludes by quoting measures suggested by the World Health Organisation to protect public health e.g. governments could require major platforms to measure, control and restrict alcohol marketing and make them share their data with public health bodies; and alcohol producers be made to disclose their marketing spend, strategies, and demographics of their target audiences.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tIye2pKvYw>

British drinking trends: recent YouGov results

A third of consumers reported drinking less alcohol over the past year. Just over half (51%) said this was because they had lost the desire to drink, followed by affordability (33%) and health concerns (29%).

Nearly two thirds of drinkers (58%) said they were consuming about the same amount as last year, whilst 8% reported drinking more.

About 40% of British drinkers aged 18+ favour beer over other drinks. Around one in five of these consume 14 or more units of alcohol a week¹, compared with 12% of people who prefer other drinks. They are also less likely to report not drinking at all in a typical week (13% compared with 21% of other drinkers).

¹ *14 units is equivalent to six pints of average-strength beer. Government recommendations advise men and women not to regularly drink more than 14 units a week and, if drinking at these levels, to spread consumption over three or more days.*

Faith Action on Gambling Harm group (FAGH):

QAAD and our FAGH colleagues will host a parliamentary reception at Westminster on Tuesday 10th November. Carla Lockhart MP (DUP) is sponsoring the event and our speakers will include Alan Smith (retired Bishop of St Albans) and Will Prochaska (director, Coalition to End Gambling Advertising, CEGA). MPs and peers will be invited to join us to discuss the harms linked to gambling advertising and how these can be reduced. A report about the event will be included in the winter issue.

Contacting QAAD

The most important aspect of QAAD's work is to support Friends and Meetings. You are welcome to contact Alison Mather for any reason by email: alison@qaad.org or by phone: 0117 9246981. If she cannot answer, please leave a brief message including your name and contact number and she will return your call asap. You can also write to her at 111 Gloucester Road, Bishopston, Bristol BS7 8AT. Please be assured that all contact with QAAD is treated in strict confidence.

Your voice

QAADRANT is enriched by different voices and ideas. We are always delighted to receive your contributions of whatever length and can publish these anonymously if you prefer. If you would like to respond to an article in this or previous issues, or share your experience, please email or write to our Director by **Monday 2nd November**.

Thank you for your support

We have felt cheered and supported by the generous donations we have continued to receive from individuals, Meetings and Trusts during this difficult time. Donations are significant in two ways - they make us feel that our work is valued, and they give QAAD a longer-term future. In order to continue our work, we need to continue to draw down from our reserves which, of course, are not unlimited. Please send your donation to: **Pete Warm, 16A Stone Hall Flats, Plymouth, PL1 3QZ**. Alternatively, if you would prefer to donate using a BACS transfer, our banks details are:

Account Name: Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs

A/C No: 20547080 Sort code: 60-83-01

If you can Gift Aid your donation, it will be enhanced by 25p for each £. Please complete the form below and return it with your donation.

I am a UK Taxpayer and want QAAD to treat all donations I have made for the past four years, and all future donations I make from the date of this declaration, as Gift Aid Donations until I notify you otherwise.

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