

World Cancer Research Fund International comment on the Irish Public Health (Alcohol) Bill

About World Cancer Research Fund International

World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) International leads and unifies a network of cancer prevention charities with a global reach, dedicated to the prevention of cancer through diet (including alcohol consumption), weight and physical activity.

We are a leading authority on cancer prevention research related to diet (including alcohol consumption), weight and physical activity. We work collaboratively with organisations around the world to encourage governments to implement policies to prevent cancer and other non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

For more information, please visit www.wcrf.org

Contact

For any queries about World Cancer Research Fund International's comment, please contact policy@wcrf.org.

Summary

WCRF International welcomes the proposals set out in the Irish Public Health (Alcohol) Bill, to require a cancer health warning on labels of alcohol products, a cancer health warning in advertisements of alcohol products and restrictions to broadcast advertisements for alcohol products, as alcohol is a known carcinogen. This comment outlines evidence on the links between alcohol and cancer, supporting the Bill's proposals.

Evidence to support policy

The Continuous Update Project (CUP) is World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) Network's ongoing programme to analyse cancer prevention and survival research related to diet (including alcohol consumption), nutrition and physical activity from all over the world. Among experts worldwide it is a trusted, authoritative scientific resource which underpins current guidelines and policy on cancer prevention and survival.

Scientific research from around the world is continually added to the CUP's unique database, which is held and systematically reviewed by a team at Imperial College London. An independent panel of experts carries out ongoing evaluations of this evidence, and their findings form the basis of the WCRF Network's Cancer Prevention Recommendations.

Through this process, the CUP ensures that everyone, including policymakers, health professionals and members of the public, has access to the most up-to-date information on how to reduce the risk of developing cancer.

The WCRF Network's Third Expert Report, *Diet, Nutrition, Physical Activity and Cancer: a Global Perspective*, launched in May 2018, brings together the very latest research from the CUP's review of the accumulated evidence on cancer prevention and survival related to diet (including alcohol consumption), nutrition and physical activity. For a full list of contents, see dietandcancerreport.org

The CUP is led and managed by WCRF International in partnership with the American Institute for Cancer Research, on behalf of WCRF UK, Wereld Kanker Onderzoek Fonds and WCRF HK.

Alcohol and cancer

WCRF International analyses global research on how consuming alcoholic drinks affects the risk of developing cancer. Our independent panel of global experts has been evaluating the evidence on cancer prevention for many years. Evidence from the Continuous Update Project shows that even small amounts of alcoholic drinks can increase the risk of some cancers and there is no level of consumption below which there is no increase in the risk of at least some cancers.

There is strong evidence that consuming alcoholic drinks increases the risk of mouth, pharynx and larynx cancers, oesophageal cancers (squamous cell carcinoma) and breast cancer (pre and postmenopause). Two or more alcoholic drinks a day (30 grams or more) increases the risk of colorectal cancer and three or more alcoholic drinks a day (45 grams or more) increases the risk of stomach and liver cancer.

For some cancers, there is an increased risk with any amount of alcohol consumed, whereas for other cancers the risk becomes apparent from a higher level of consumption, of about two or three drinks a day (about 30 or 45 grams of alcohol per day). The evidence shows that, in general, the more alcoholic drinks people consume, the higher the risk of many cancers. The exception is kidney cancer, where the risk is lower for up to two alcoholic drinks a day; however, for more than two drinks a day the level of risk is unclear.

Type of alcoholic drink and cancer risk

Alcoholic drinks of all types have a similar impact on cancer risk.

Cancer Prevention Recommendation related to alcohol

"Limit alcohol consumption. For cancer prevention it's best not to drink alcohol" is one of World Cancer Research Fund International's ten Cancer Prevention Recommendations.

<https://www.wcrf.org/dietandcancer/cancer-prevention-recommendations>

The Cancer Prevention Recommendations are made by our Independent Expert Panel and based on strong evidence.

Public health and policy implications

A comprehensive package of policies is needed to reduce alcohol consumption at a population level, including policies that influence the availability, affordability and acceptability of alcoholic drinks. Ireland's Public Health (Alcohol) Bill does this by including multiple measures including minimum price, labelling of alcohol products, advertising restrictions, separation and visibility of alcohol products, and regulation to sale and supply of alcohol products.

References

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