

Minister for Health, Jennifer Carroll MacNeill, TD

Department of Health
Miesian Plaza
Baggot Street Lower
Dublin 2
Ireland

18 June 2025

Health warning labels on alcohol are crucial to preventing cancer

Dear Health Minister,

I am writing on behalf of World Cancer Research Fund International to urge you to ensure that the planned introduction of alcohol health labels in May 2026, which are mandated under the Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 (PHAA), come into force without delay.

Our flagship initiative, the Global Cancer Update Programme (CUP Global), is the only authoritative, ongoing analysis of global research on how alcohol, as well as nutrition and physical activity affect cancer risk and survival. It confirms that alcohol is a well-established modifiable risk factor for seven cancer types, including breast and bowel, two of the most common cancers, and oesophageal, one of the hardest to treat. Yet public awareness remains low—something we at World Cancer Research Fund International are committed to changing.

As a leading authority on the links between diet, nutrition, physical activity, alcohol and cancer, we work to ensure that the public and policymakers alike are informed by the latest scientific evidence. We are an international not-for-profit association that leads and unites a global network of cancer prevention charities, including the American Institute for Cancer Research, World Cancer Research Fund UK, and Wereld Kanker Onderzoek Fonds in the Netherlands.

Since 2016, we have been in official relations with the World Health Organization (WHO), and we work in partnership with international agencies, governments and civil society to advance robust, evidence-based policies that promote healthy diets and lifestyles, reduce health inequalities, and protect future generations from preventable disease—including cancer.

The evidence on cancer risk posed by alcohol is unequivocal, alcohol is a Group 1 carcinogen. Still, public awareness in Ireland of the link between alcohol and cancer remains worryingly low.

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This is reflected in the nation's alcohol consumption, which is significantly above the EU average and categorised by high levels of binge drinking.

We strongly support alcohol health warning labels as detailed in our Alcohol and Cancer Risk policy position statement (enclosed). The alcohol labelling measure included in the PHAA is not only an evidenced-based policy included in the WHO's 'best buys' but also has immense public backing, with 70% of those polled supportive of the measure. Crucially, the provision marks a significant step towards the Irish Government fulfilling their duty to protect the public from alcohol harm and reduce preventable cancers.

The recent representations made by the alcohol industry about alcohol labelling are misleading as the labels will only apply to products sold within Ireland and will have no impact on exports. Such arguments also do not consider the negative health, social and economic impacts of alcohol, which have been estimated by the WHO to cost the state 2.5% of GDP (€12 billion annually).

Just as Ireland led the way with its pioneering ban on smoking in public places, it is once again setting a global example by introducing mandatory health warning labels on alcoholic beverages. This bold public health measure reinforces Ireland's reputation as a leader in protecting population health and provides a clear roadmap for other countries seeking to follow suit.

The Irish Government must stand firm on alcohol labelling and resist industry influence. Doing so will solidify Ireland's record as a world leader on public health and set a much-needed example for other Governments across the globe.

Yours sincerely,

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