

CASE STUDY:

ALCOHOL AND CANCER: LET'S TALK

Mobilising policy change and increasing public awareness in the UK



OUR CAMPAIGN OBJECTIVES

1. Raise public and policymaker awareness of the link between alcohol and cancer through public polling.
2. Influence government policy by calling for a National Alcohol Strategy which includes
 - Minimum unit pricing in England
 - Mandatory cancer warning labels on alcohol
 - Stronger restrictions on alcohol advertising.
3. Position WCRF as the UK's leading cancer voice on this issue.

OUR STRATEGIC APPROACH

1. Policy-led campaigning

- **Clear policy asks:** Framed the campaign around specific and evidence-based policy asks. These were based on the World Health Organization's Best Buys and its SAFER initiative, and developed in consultation with campaign partners - with cancer warning labels emerging as a standout policy issue.
- **Parliamentary action:**
 - Delivered a Change.org petition and letter to the Prime Minister at No.10 Downing Street on behalf of 20 health and alcohol organisations.
 - Secured the first-ever parliamentary debate on alcohol and cancer in the House of Commons and mobilised MPs and Lords to promote campaign messages.
 - Tabled an Early Day Motion and Scottish Motion as a tool to gather cross-party parliamentary support in both Westminster and the Scottish Parliament.

2. Strong communications and media strategy

- Developed the theme 'Alcohol and Cancer: Let's Talk' to start stigma-free conversations about alcohol consumption and the links between alcohol and cancer.
- Created a compelling narrative linking personal stories, expert voices, and polling data (on reasons for not drinking, and awareness of the link between alcohol and cancer) to media-friendly headlines.

OUR CAMPAIGN

In June 2025, World Cancer Research Fund led a bold national campaign during its annual Cancer Prevention Action Week to raise awareness of the link between alcohol and cancer. Using polling data about the low awareness of alcohol as a cause of 7 types of cancer and statistics about alcohol-related cancer diagnoses, the campaign called for a National Alcohol Strategy for England - one that includes minimum unit pricing, mandatory labelling and marketing restrictions.

In a complex and competitive media and political environment, World Cancer Research Fund broke through with a powerful story, strong spokespeople, stakeholder coalitions and bold public messaging. This case study shares the approaches and learnings from the campaign.

- Released a suite of campaign assets including a video, infographics, social content, and a campaign toolkit.
- Secured over **50 national and regional media articles**, **60+ broadcast mentions**, and coverage on high-profile platforms including *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Independent* and *The Telegraph* as well as *Channel 5*, and across *BBC radio stations*.

3. Stakeholder and coalition engagement

- Collaborated with **8 alcohol-related non-governmental organisations** and **29 wider public health and cancer organisations**.
- Delivered 3 external press releases via partner networks to amplify messages.
- Partnered with Alcohol Health Alliance on joint advocacy and briefings as well as securing the Parliamentary Backbench Business Debate on alcohol and cancer.

4. Influencer and Public Engagement

- Worked with **13 trusted influencers** including health professionals and public figures to extend campaign reach.
- Launched a **Change.org petition** – used primarily as a media and public affairs engagement tool despite modest sign-up rates.
- Created accessible health professional content and ran a webinar (with **129 attendees**) to upskill and activate health professionals.



IMPACT

- **Policy impact:** Government committed to introducing mandatory alcohol labels in its 10-Year Health Plan – a major win.
- **Public engagement:**
 - 105k social impressions and over 17k views on the campaign video.
 - Most engaged Cancer Prevention Action Week health information webinar since 2022.
- **Reputation shift:** World Cancer Research Fund recognised nationally and within the alcohol harm community as a trusted voice on cancer and alcohol.



KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- **Bold positioning:** Addressed a taboo issue with clarity and confidence.
- **Timely and agile execution:** Capitalised on national health plan debates and global momentum on alcohol cancer warning labelling in Ireland.
- **Trusted messengers:** Expert academics, clinicians, and powerful patient stories helped humanise statistics and build credibility.
- **Cross-sector collaboration:** Strengthened national voice through strategic coalition-building and aligned messaging.



CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

- **Petition numbers were low**, reflecting how difficult it is to turn public awareness into action on polarising or less-understood health issues like alcohol and cancer.
- **Influencer-brand alignment matters** – while influencers added visibility, choosing those aligned with campaign values was essential to maintain trust and credibility.
- **Alcohol messaging is sensitive** – stigma, public defensiveness, and cultural norms mean that non-judgemental, empathetic framing is essential.
- **Preparation is crucial** – high-risk topics require watertight internal review processes, consistent messaging, and thorough media and spokesperson preparation.
- **A bold and cohesive campaign identity works** – strong branding, visuals, and narrative cohesion helped the campaign cut through a noisy media landscape and gain recognition across sectors.
- **Social media is vital for amplification** – it drove visibility, especially through reels, influencer content, and live moments. It also supported media and parliamentary activity in real time, keeping the campaign dynamic and engaging.



- **Be persistent in securing parliamentary champions** – success in parliament did not happen by chance. Behind-the-scenes legwork, including repeated outreach, follow-up, and supporting materials, was essential to building political support and momentum.
- **Hit multiple touchpoints repeatedly** – the campaign succeeded by reinforcing messages through multiple channels (media, parliament, public, health professionals) over time. Repetition built recognition and pressure, helping turn conversation into action.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

- **Anchor your campaign in clear policy objectives.** Define focused, achievable asks that align with national health priorities and are grounded in international best practice. Clear policy goals provide structure, legitimacy, and a measurable route to impact.



- **Highlight cancer within the wider range of alcohol-related harms.** Alongside impacts such as anxiety, depression, and sleep disruption, cancer provides a compelling entry point that resonates with the public, professionals, and policymakers – helping to reduce stigma, refresh public health dialogue, and cut through competing narratives.
- **Collaborate early and often.** Engage non-governmental organisations, academics, health professionals, and regional/local actors from the outset. Strategic partnerships strengthen credibility, amplify reach, and help tailor messaging to different audiences.
- **Invest in media relationships.** Secure media coverage through compelling pre-briefing materials, human-interest stories, and trusted spokespeople. Offer exclusives for high profile media needing bespoke content and be agile and adapt messages and stories to the needs of journalists and their editors to ensure strong coverage.
- **Don't underestimate preparation.** Sensitive topics like alcohol and cancer require careful planning, coordinated messaging, and watertight internal sign-off. Build in time for testing, training spokespeople, and developing rebuttals.
- **Leverage influencers wisely.** Partner with trusted voices who align with your values and can authentically communicate your messages. Influencers can reach new audiences but must be carefully vetted to avoid reputational risk.



- **Use social media to amplify and extend reach.** Social media – Instagram, LinkedIn, X and Bluesky – played a central role in Cancer Prevention Action Week – supporting campaign launches, live moments, and influencer engagement. It's a vital tool for reaching the public, policymakers, and journalists in real time.
- **Create engaging, adaptable content.** Toolkits, infographics, videos, and factsheets that are easy to share and reuse across channels and sectors helped World Cancer Research Fund maximise the campaign's reach. Ensure your materials are accessible, clear and compelling and visually strong.
- **Track and respond to political opportunities.** Be agile and ready to capitalise on shifting political contexts or policy announcements. Timing matters – and aligning your campaign with live political debates can supercharge your impact.
- **Accept that not every tactic converts directly.** Some tools – like petitions – may have low conversion rates but still offer important value as media hooks or public engagement mechanisms. Focus on the wider ecosystem of influence.
- **The work continues even though the campaign is over.** Ensure you have a plan for how to keep the momentum going, even if your campaign is over. Think about how to keep the pressure on and sustain interest and momentum.

CONCLUSION

The 2025 **Cancer Prevention Action Week** demonstrated the power of focused, policy-led campaigning on alcohol and cancer. For international organisations seeking to raise awareness and influence alcohol policy, World Cancer Research Fund's campaign offers a model of strategic collaboration, media impact, and health advocacy grounded in evidence and public engagement.

Our thanks:

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For more information about Cancer Prevention Action Week 2025, please visit wcrf.org/cpaw25



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