

RARHA WORK PACKAGE 5

Good practice principles in the use of drinking guidelines to reduce alcohol related harm

Background

Guidelines for limiting drinking in order to reduce risks of harm are being used in most EU countries. Levels of drinking considered to be low risk or high risk differ from one country to another. Guidelines on alcohol consumption levels not to be exceeded may be given per day or per week. The guidelines may be different for men and for women, or for younger people and older people.

Low or high risk alcohol consumption levels are typically given in terms of “standard drinks”. The “standard drink” is not the same as a standard serving of beer, wine or spirits. It is a way of expressing the quantity of pure alcohol in a drink or in a bottle, can or other container. The size of a “standard drink” varies from one country to another, being typically either 10 g or 12 g pure alcohol. Larger or smaller standards exist, such as the “unit” in the UK, containing 8 g pure alcohol.

The variation reflects differences in drinking cultures and in approaches to risk prevention. It may become a source of confusion when information is spread across borders for example on the labels of alcoholic beverages or through the internet. Conflicting information on drinking levels considered high risk or low risk may reduce the potential for effect of risk communication.

Purpose and methods

Work Package 5 seeks to clarify reasons behind the variation and work towards consensus on good practice principles for the use of drinking guidelines to reduce short-term and chronic harm from alcohol.

Background papers are produced to summarize knowledge and experiences relating to the following:

- Drinking guidelines in partner countries
- Practices in brief interventions for hazardous drinking
- Guidelines on drinking by young people
- The science basis for guidelines regarding working age population
- “Standard drink” definitions and related public awareness approaches

The rationale behind different definitions and approaches as well as areas of potential consensus will be explored by means of:

- Exchange between experts
- Dialogue with policymakers
- A consumer survey
- A Policy Delphi study

Expected outcomes

The results will be presented in articles, reports and policy briefs. In the short term the aim is to increase understanding among public health policy makers of the scientific basis and practical implications of the use of low risk drinking guidelines to reduce risks of harm.

Wider consensus on good practice principles regarding the use of drinking guidelines as a public health measure is conducive to more aligned messages to the general population, subgroups and health professionals. Informing people on factors that influence their health and empowering them towards healthy lifestyles contributes in the longer term to reduced harm from alcohol.