

# Healthy Lifestyles: Preventing Cancer

A Wales Cancer Alliance Policy Paper  
Summer 2017



## Healthy lifestyles: Overview

The Wales Cancer Alliance is committed to tackling cancer through evidence-based public health interventions. The effects of smoking, alcohol consumption, physical inactivity and poor diet have well established direct links with cancer and a number of other chronic conditions. Improving the health and wellbeing of Welsh residents will contribute towards stemming the projected increases in the prevalence of cancer and contribute to lowering the overall disease burden on the National Health Service.

## Cancer Delivery Plan<sup>1</sup>

Whilst the Cancer Delivery Plan focuses primarily on the diagnosis and treatment of cancer, there is some recognition placed on the importance of lowering the instances of preventable cancers. The Cancer Delivery Plan (November 2016) outlines that *“It is important to reinforce the need for people to take responsibility for their health lifestyle in order to play their part in reducing their risk of ill health.....Alongside this, the public sector, third sector and private sector should do all they can to enable and encourage people to lead healthier lives”*.

The Cancer Delivery Plan places a clear set of actions on Local Health Boards to play their role in improving public health:

*“Work with local government, Public Health Wales NHS Trust, GPs, pharmacists, dentists, opticians, the Third Sector and others to use data on cancer incidence and mortality to identify, implement and audit local strategies, clearly stated population outcomes and performance measures and targets to prevent cancer. In particular, to:*

- *promote better public awareness of cancer risk factors*
- *reduce smoking, obesity and excess alcohol intake”*

## Public Health (Wales) Act 2017

The Public Health (Wales) Act 2017 places further restrictions on smoking and sets out new bans on tobacco and nicotine products from being handed over to under 18s by home delivery or collection services. It also creates a national register of retailers of tobacco and nicotine products. The legislation also places a duty on the Welsh Government to develop a strategy to reduce and prevent obesity.

## Background

Many of the risk factors for cancer are known but vary by cancer type and site. Smoking causes over 80 per cent of lung cancers and is also responsible for nearly a fifth of all cancers in the UK. Each year in Wales, lung cancer is responsible for more deaths than bowel and breast cancers combined<sup>2</sup>. 54% of all bowel cancer cases are linked to lifestyle factors including red and processed meat consumption (21%), overweight and obesity (13%), alcohol (12%), smoking (8%) and ionising radiation (2%)<sup>3</sup>. In addition, skin cancer is now one of the most common types of cancer in people between the ages of 15 to 34. Each year more than 700 people in Wales are diagnosed with malignant melanoma and around 150 people will die from the condition even though it is one of the most preventable cancers<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Welsh Government (2016) [“Cancer Delivery Plan for Wales 2016 – 2020: The highest standard of care for everyone with cancer”](#)

<sup>2</sup> Source: Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit’s Cancer Registry [www.wcisuwales.nhs.uk](http://www.wcisuwales.nhs.uk) Number of deaths from different types of cancer, 2012

<sup>3</sup> Source: CRUK, Cancer Statistics by Cancer Type, November 2016 <http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/statistics-by-cancer-type/bowel-cancer#heading-Three>

<sup>4</sup> Source: Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit’s Cancer Registry [www.wcisuwales.nhs.uk](http://www.wcisuwales.nhs.uk) Cancer Incidence in Wales, February 2017

Other known risk factors that account for a large number of cancer cases in the population are:

- Alcohol;
- Obesity and diet;
- Sun exposure;
- Physical inactivity;
- Certain infections (i.e Human Papillomavirus in Cervical, Head and Neck, Anal and Penile Cancers).

### Calls for Action

The Wales Cancer Alliance calls for:

#### 1) A minimum unit pricing policy for Wales

Whilst the Wales Cancer Alliance recognises that some of the major levers for lowering harms associated with alcohol are held by the UK Government, we believe there are still progressive steps that can be undertaken by a Welsh Government.

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A 45p minimum unit price (MUP) has been shown to have a demonstrable impact in preventing death. The 2014 study by Sheffield University on *'The Potential benefits of minimum unit pricing for alcohol versus a ban on below cost selling in England 2014'*<sup>5</sup> estimated that a move to a minimum unit price policy would save 624 deaths (54% of the total number of alcohol-related deaths in Scotland for 2015) and 23,700 hospital admissions. This principle has already been adopted in Scotland following The Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Act 2012, passed in June 2012.

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In its most recent legislative programme, the Welsh Government indicated that it intended to pursue legislation to introduce minimum unit pricing for alcohol (MUP), subject to the outcome of the current Supreme Court case on MUP in Scotland. The Alliance welcomes this, as it will help to reduce alcohol consumption and prevent cancers in Wales. If the Supreme Court ruling means that the Welsh Government cannot legislate in this way, the Alliance urges the Welsh Government to identify other interventions that could reduce alcohol consumption.

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#### 2) Appropriate and effective smoking cessation support

Whilst LHBs have made some good progress in developing cessation services, the application of level three smoking cessation services across Wales is at present inconsistent. We believe that community pharmacies in Wales should be equipped with the appropriately trained staff to support individuals on their journey to quitting. We would also call on Welsh Government to ensure schools and colleges have appropriately trained staff to provide confidential quit support to young people with tobacco addictions.

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There also needs to be mass media campaigns on smoking cessation. These are the most effective and cost-effective way to encourage smokers to quit and discourage young people from taking up smoking.

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Furthermore, there is a huge disparity of smoking prevalence rates among different groups in Wales, with routine and manual workers, BAME groups, and those with mental health conditions much more likely to smoke. Efforts need to be in place to target these groups to bring down smoking rates.

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#### 3) Statutory targets to increase physical activity

A coalition of organisations including Sustrans Cymru, British Medical Association, Royal College of Physicians, Play Wales, Tenovus Cancer Care and the Royal College of Paediatrics & Child Health have

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<sup>5</sup>Brennan Alan, Meng Yang, Holmes John, Hill-McManus Daniel, Meier Petra S. Potential benefits of minimum unit pricing for alcohol versus a ban on below cost selling in England 2014: modelling study BMJ 2014; 349 :g5452

called for the inclusion of statutory targets to increase physical activity (at a Wales-wide level). The Wales Cancer Alliance recognises the potential importance of targets as a way of increasing physical activity.

**4) As a result of the Public Health (Wales) Act, an effective national obesity strategy must be developed to include:**

- Clear and ambitious targets for adults and childhood obesity levels
- A comprehensive, independent monitoring and evaluation of the strategy and its component parts, funded by the Welsh government
- A cross-departmental approach to obesity bringing together national government, the NHS and local government partners.

There is no silver bullet in tackling obesity. A comprehensive approach should build on the evidence-based recommendations of Public Health England and Foods Standards Scotland. We recommend the following measures:

- Increased investment in active travel options like cycling and walking to boost physical activity levels.
- Supporting and encouraging companies in Wales, in particular those from the out of home sector, to participate in Public Health England's sugar reduction programme and the expected calorie reduction programme.
- Increasing funding to programmes aimed at tackling childhood obesity in Wales using the funding allocated to Wales from the spending of the Soft Drinks Industry Levy revenue.

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**5) A reduction in health inequalities**

The Wales Cancer Alliance recognises that Wales experiences different levels of health and well-being as a result of a variety of factors and that no one solution to overcome these variations will, in isolation, reduce health inequalities across Wales. With the aim of reducing the unfair and unjust inequalities in people's health and wellbeing, the Alliance would expect to see swifter progress on the Reducing Inequalities in Health Strategic Action Plan set out in 2011, given the apparent lack of progress to date.<sup>6</sup>

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**6) Human Papilloma Virus Vaccinations for all young people**

The Wales Cancer Alliance calls for all Boys aged 11- 12 to receive the HPV vaccination in line with Australia, and the United States. More than 3,000 cases of cervical cancer are diagnosed each year, and nearly all are related to a HPV infection. Steps have already been taken to reduce risk through vaccinations for girls aged 12-13. However, this is not the case for boys. HPV has also been linked to non-gender-specific cancers such as throat, mouth and tongue cancer. The World Health Organisation has stressed that HPV Vaccinations should be offered to all by every country that can afford it.

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**7) A Sun Safety Strategy**

As the incidence of skin cancer increases, the Wales Cancer Alliance calls for a national strategy for the prevention of skin cancer coordinated by Public Health Wales. Sun safety awareness needs to be made compulsory through the Healthy Schools programme; including the appointment of Sun Safety Champions at primary schools. Schools should use an 'Eco Schools Green Flag' model to gain 'Sun Safe School' status and educate children at a young age around the dangers of excessive sun exposure.

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<sup>6</sup> Welsh Government (2011) Fairer Health Outcomes For All; Reduction Inequalities in Health Strategic Action Plan, 2011on Plan