

FOR IMMEDIATE PUBLICATION ON THURSDAY 26th MARCH 2020 ***

Issued on behalf of Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP)

Coronavirus (COVID-19) and People with Alcohol-related Problems: Recommendations for Services

Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP) has published new guidance in response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. It provides recommendations for Alcohol and Drug Partnerships (ADPs), Commissioners, Alcohol Service Managers, Community Services and Mutual Aid and Support Groups, to enable them to reduce risks and ensure continued support for people with alcohol-related problems during this public health emergency.

SHAAP recognises that the COVID-19 crisis means that health and related services will be severely stretched. The SHAAP guidance is intended to support and not to contradict or replicate any local contingency plans that are in place. SHAAP warns that any reduction in alcohol services is likely to lead to greater alcohol-related morbidity and mortality in the medium to long-term and argues that alcohol liaison services in acute hospitals should be sustained, where possible; these can be very useful in facilitating early discharge of patients with alcohol-related problems and so improve bed availability in acute services.

The new SHAAP guidance points out that alcohol continues to be marketed in shops, in the media and on the internet and that suppliers will make home deliveries during the current crisis. It suggests that the fact that alcohol may no longer be consumed in public places, increases risks related to home drinking, where alcohol is cheaper, compounded by the stress that the current situation is causing. Use of other substances, including tobacco, will add to their risks of health and other harms.

Alcohol withdrawal is a common reason for emergency admission to hospitals in Scotland, in particular in the acute sector. SHAAP's guidance also provides advice for heavy drinkers on cutting back or stopping drinking alcohol, which includes the aim of reducing these presentations.

As well as providing advice for statutory services, SHAAP emphasises the importance of mutual aid and support groups for help and support for recovery from alcohol-related problems takes place in communal settings. It provides linkages to organisations, including Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), the Scottish Recovery Consortium and Scottish Families affected by Alcohol and Drugs, which have moved quickly in the current crisis to establish recovery-based on-line meetings and support services.

Dr Eric Carlin, SHAAP Director, said:

“The scale of the current public health emergency is hard to contemplate. For many people who are recovering from alcohol-related problems, the risks of relapse are huge. I hope that they will follow official advice in relation to reducing risks of COVID-19 infection and also that they will go online to use the alcohol recovery support networks that are there.”

Recognising that at some stage, normality will return, SHAAP Chair, Dr Peter Rice, said:

“Alcohol causes major challenges in Scotland and this continues in the COVID-19 pandemic. Scottish Health Action on Alcohol problems is proud to be part of the progressive Scottish approach to tackling alcohol harm and we hope this advice is helpful to people in the current difficult situation.”

ENDS

The new SHAAP guidance can be downloaded here:

<https://www.shaap.org.uk/downloads/reports-and-briefings.html>

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Notes to Editors:

Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP) is a partnership of the Medical Royal Colleges in Scotland and the Faculty of Public Health and is based at the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh (RCPE). SHAAP provides the authoritative medical and clinical voice on the need to reduce the impact of alcohol-related harm on the health and wellbeing of people in Scotland and the evidence-based approaches to achieve this.