

For immediate release

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## **‘My Health, My Right’: This World Health Day, Drinkaware Calls for Increased Awareness of the Health Effects of Excessive Drinking**

- *Liver disease remains the health effect most prominently associated with excessive drinking at 86% total awareness.*
- *Five other effects are recognised by at least two-thirds of adults, including depression and impaired judgement; however, spontaneous awareness of many health risks associated with excessive drinking remains limited.*
- *Almost 30% of drinkers would like clear information on standard drinks and the HSE Low-Risk Weekly Guidelines to help them moderate their alcohol consumption.*

Ahead of the WHO’s World Health Day, taking place globally this weekend, Drinkaware, the national, independent charity working to prevent and reduce alcohol misuse, is sharing results from its latest research when it comes to the health effects of excessive drinking.

World Health Day 2024 takes place on Sunday, April 7<sup>th</sup>, with the theme ‘My Health, My Right’. This year’s theme was chosen to champion the right of everyone, everywhere, to have access to quality health services, education, and information. As the national charity offering clear, non-judgmental, and factual information to the public, as well as practical advice and tips to encourage and embed healthier behaviour, Drinkaware is committed to raising awareness about the potential health risks associated with excessive alcohol consumption and, in particular, harmful patterns such as binge drinking.

The Drinkaware Barometer 2023\* gives us some crucial insights into what may influence adults to drink less. 48% of those who had reduced their consumption said they are more conscious now about the health effects associated with alcohol. Indeed, among those drinkers who are already making the choice to drink less, 63% cite physical health or fitness as a reason, with 31% mentioning their mental health.

In terms of knowledge among the public of the potential health risks of excessive drinking\*\*, liver disease remains the health effect most prominently mentioned, with 86% total awareness. Indeed, over half (56%) of adults spontaneously mention liver disease when asked about any short or long-term health effects of excessive drinking that they may be aware of. Five other effects are recognised by at least two-thirds of adults, including:

- Impaired Judgement: 72% total awareness (1% spontaneous awareness)
- Depression: 68% total awareness (9% spontaneous awareness)
- Dehydration: 68% total awareness (no spontaneous awareness)
- Lack of Concentration: 67% total awareness (1% spontaneous awareness)
- Headache: 66% total awareness (3% spontaneous awareness)

However, while these figures demonstrate that total awareness of specific, mostly short-term, health effects is present for a significant cohort of adults, spontaneous awareness remains limited, particularly for more long-term health impacts. This is clear when we look at figures for awareness around other conditions such as heart disease or stroke, which has 59% total awareness, but only 14% spontaneously, cancer with 48% total awareness but 13%

spontaneously, or foetal disorders during pregnancy, which, despite 58% total awareness (peaking at 70% among women), registered no spontaneous awareness at all.

**Drinkaware spokesperson, GP at Ennis Medical, Dr Máire Finn, commented:**

*“According to the latest Drinkaware Barometer\* data, 48% of people were aware that excessive alcohol consumption can lead to cancer. However, there are some positive actions we can take to reduce our own and our family’s cancer risk. Cutting down or cutting out alcohol is one of the ways we can help to lower the cancer risk\*\*\*, and the risk of developing alcohol-related cancers is lower for people who drink within the HSE low-risk weekly alcohol guidelines.”\*\*\*\**

**Drinkaware CEO Dearbhla O’Brien commented:**

*“This year’s theme for World Health Day ‘My Health, My Right’ aligns completely with Drinkaware’s values, and we want the public to know that we are here to offer tailored messages, advice, education, and evidence-informed resources that they can use to ensure they are reducing any potentially harmful impacts on their health linked to alcohol.*

*The latest Drinkaware Barometer\* tells us that the number one tool or technique that people would find helpful for moderating their drinking is clear information on what is meant by a standard drink and the maximum number an adult should drink in a week at 29%. Other top tools and techniques mentioned include resources such as a Drinks Calculator at 22% or public health information campaigns (also 22%). Over one in five drinkers (21%) cite a measuring cup, which indicates what is meant by a standard drink as a tool that they would find useful.*

*What is clear is that people want to create a more positive relationship with alcohol, and ultimately, keeping track or measuring how much you are drinking is vital if you want to reduce the risk to your health. We would encourage all adults who are thinking about reducing any potentially negative health effects associated with their own alcohol consumption to check out our website on [www.drinkaware.ie](http://www.drinkaware.ie) where they can access all of the information and resources mentioned above, and we continue to encourage all stakeholders in this area to work together to ultimately reduce and prevent alcohol-related harms.”*

**-Ends-**

#### **NOTES TO EDITOR:**

\*The Drinkaware Barometer 2023 is a national population-based survey of 1,000 adults aged 18+ conducted by Behaviour and Attitudes in July/August 2023 and included a series of internationally recognised modules relating to alcohol consumption and mental health.

For more information on research projects and publications, visit [www.drinkaware.ie/research](http://www.drinkaware.ie/research)

\*\*Participants in the Drinkaware Barometer 2023 were shown a list of negative effects from drinking alcohol over the recommended levels on both short and long-term health and asked which they were aware of prior to the survey in order to gauge total awareness.

\*\*\* European Code Against Cancer 4th Edition: 12 ways to reduce your Cancer risk. World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.canep.2015.05.009>

\*\*\*\* Drinking within the HSE Low-Risk Weekly Alcohol Guidelines reduces your risk of alcohol-related health issues. The Low-Risk Weekly Guidelines for adults are:

- Women: Less than 11 standard drinks (110g pure alcohol) spread out over the week, with at least two alcohol-free days
- Men: Less than 17 standard drinks (170g pure alcohol) spread out over the week, with at least two alcohol-free days

### **Binge drinking:**

Binge drinking (or heavy episodic drinking) is consuming six or more standard drinks in one sitting, usually in a short space of time. Common standard drinks include a half pint of 4.5% lager, a 100ml glass of 12.5% wine and a pub measure of 40% spirits.

### **About Drinkaware:**

Drinkaware is the national charity working to prevent and reduce alcohol misuse in Ireland. It is governed by an independent board and regulated by the Charities Regulator. Registered Charity Number: 20204601

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