

Alcohol Programme 2004–2007

A tool to help prevent the adverse effects of alcohol



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Objectives

The objective of public alcohol policy is to prevent and reduce the adverse effects of alcohol. Because alcohol consumption in Finland has been rising for some time now, it is vital over the next few years:

- to reduce the harmful impact of drinking on the welfare of children and families
- to reduce risk-level drinking and its ill-effects
- to achieve a down-turn in the overall consumption of alcoholic beverages.¹

The Alcohol Programme 2004–2007 is a tool for intensified prevention of the adverse effects of alcohol. It comprises strategies for action and broad-based co-operation co-ordinated by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.²

Methods

Several approaches are used to reduce alcohol abuse. As resources are limited, they should be focussed on mutually supportive methods already found effective in practice.

The Alcohol Programme 2004–2007 underlines the following approaches:

Among adults, preventing the adverse effects of alcohol consumption by

- providing support for parents
- supplying information about ill-effects and ways of getting help
- preventing violence in the home
- ensuring good operating potential for child welfare services.

¹ Government Resolution on Strategies in Alcohol Policy. Brochures of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2003:6.

² Alcohol Programme 2004–2007. Starting points for co-operation in 2004. Publications of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2004:7.

Among teenagers and young people, preventing the adverse effects of alcohol consumption

- by ensuring co-operation between parents, schools, youth services, NGOs and the business world
- through restrictions on alcohol availability and work to support the young
- by restricting alcohol advertising
- through education on the effects of alcohol and drugs.

In the case of occasional consumption of alcohol, averting ill-effects by

- preventing disturbances and violent behaviour in public places
- ensuring compliance with sales and licensing rules
- increasing responsibility for the serving of alcohol
- preventing drunken driving
- reducing risks related to leisure time and occupational safety and health.

In the case of long-term drinking, preventing ill-effects

- by making assessment of the risks from drinking part of general assessment of a person's state of health
- through advice and early intervention in the case of risk groups
- by ensuring the geographical coverage, availability and quality of substance abuse services
- by providing information about the risks of drinking, risk assessment and self-control methods to limit consumption.

The less alcohol is consumed, the fewer the ill-effects on individuals, families and society at large. Action targeted at specific risks and adverse effects is less effective if the alcohol consumption of the population as a whole is not reduced.

Total consumption can be influenced

- through alcohol taxation
- by keeping retail sales of wines and spirits as the operation of Alko, the state retail monopoly.
- by ensuring that the administration and supervision of licensing play a bigger role in reducing problems and adverse effects on public well-being and the immediate environment.

Principles

The Alcohol Programme 2004–2007 is guided by four key principles: local impact, effectiveness, public acceptability and partnership.

Effectiveness

Action is based on tried and tested methods and its quality is constantly being improved.

Partnership

Action comprises co-operation between central and local government, NGOs and the business world.



Local impact

Action aims to promote public well-being and bring about changes in the immediate environment that help prevent the ill-effects of alcohol.

Acceptability

All objectives and methods must enjoy public support, which can be gained through open debate.

Alcohol Programme 2004 – 2007

Main purpose of alcohol policy: reduction of alcohol related harm

Reduction in harm to children, young people and families

- Support for families
- Prevention of domestic violence
- Child protection work
- Enforcement of age limits
- Community mobilization
- Alcohol education
- Restrictions on marketing

Reduction in long and short-term risky drinking and related problems

- Multiple strategies to reduce drunkenness, disorder & violence
- Safety in work, traffic & leisure activities
- Developing self-help skills, brief intervention and treatment services

Reversing the trend in overall consumption:

- reduction in all harmful effects

- ensuring effectiveness of all measures

- State monopoly: retail sales of wine & spirits
- License system: retail sales of beer & cider
- License system: bars & restaurants
- Fairly high alcohol taxation

Partnership between the governments, municipalities, churches, NGOs, social partners and industry organizations

- Each partner is responsible for their own share of joint work: own targets, own action plans.
- Co-ordination and support from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

Further objectives

- Encouraging co-operation
- Strengthening the structural framework
- Promoting a comprehensive approach
- Fostering clear goal setting, evaluation of effectiveness and quality improvement

Participants

The harmful impact of alcohol is felt throughout society, and the decisions and strategies of many actors in society can help reduce the ill-effects. The Alcohol Programme 2004–2007 co-ordinates a large part of the work being done to prevent this damage.

The Programme's objectives and strategies guide central government in alcohol-related issues.

Other participants work together under **partnership agreements**. This co-operation helps to ensure attainment of the objectives. The various partners take responsibility for preventing and reducing alcohol abuse in their particular fields and define concrete targets for their own work.

Participants can join in the Alcohol Programme at any time during the programme period. At the end of 2004, the hundred-odd partners included:

- about 60 NGOs
- the Evangelical-Lutheran Church, the Orthodox Church, and the Free Church Council of Finland
- various professional organizations in social welfare and health care
- organizations of employers and employees in the catering and alcohol retailing fields
- central labour market organizations
- about 20 municipalities.

Municipalities

Since they are responsible for providing public social and health services, the municipalities play a crucial role in preventing the adverse effects of alcohol. They are also involved in prevention of substance abuse through several administrative bodies.

The Alcohol Programme 2004–2007 provides municipalities with guidelines for stepping up local work on substance abuse.

The elements in this work comprise prevention, substance abuse services,

and ways in which the municipality can influence retailing and licensed sales in its area. If efforts to prevent substance abuse are to be successful, broad-based co-operation and adequate resources are needed. Small municipalities, in particular, should consider collaborating on a sub-regional basis in their prevention efforts and provision of specialist substance abuse services.

Municipalities joining the Alcohol Programme through a partnership agreement commit themselves to updating their substance abuse strategy and to drawing up a concrete action plan for the next few years based on the Programme. Decisions about partnerships are made by the municipal council or a competent committee.

The process

Effective prevention of the adverse effects of alcohol demands a long perspective, systematic planning and a comprehensive approach. The Alcohol Programme 2004–2007 is a tool for guiding the necessary preventative work. The main approaches adopted are evaluated and developed further on the basis of this evaluation.

The aim is to establish a more comprehensive and sustainable operating model for the preventive work done by central and local government, NGOs and other partners. The Alcohol Programme is designed to broaden and deepen co-operation, strengthen operating structures, disseminate good practices and rationalize operations to form a more systematic whole.

The partners in the Alcohol Programme are committed to setting clear objectives for their work to prevent the adverse effects of alcohol and to monitoring this work's effectiveness. **Evaluating effectiveness helps to ensure that operations are increasingly successful.**

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is drawing up an **interim survey** of the success of work done during the Alcohol Programme and of trends in alcohol consumption and its ill-effects. This survey will be placed before Parliament in spring 2006 as part of the Government report on social welfare and health care. It will also be used to further improve operations and to revise the guidelines for the rest of the programme period.

Financing

The State Budget includes appropriations for preventing the adverse effects of alcohol. The partners in the Alcohol Programme 2004–2007 work on reducing these ill-effects in their individual sphere of operations as far as their own resources allow.

Financial assistance for work to prevent adverse effects from alcohol can be applied for as follows:

▪ Central government grants for development projects in social welfare and health care	<i>Municipalities</i>
▪ Public appropriations for health promotion	<i>Municipalities and NGOs</i>
▪ Funding from the Slot Machine Association	<i>NGOs</i>

Structures

The Alcohol Programme 2004–2007 relies on existing co-operation structures. Its organization supports collaboration and emphasizes that the parties involved are all responsible for achieving the common goal of reducing the adverse effects of alcohol.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health carries the main responsibility for guiding and co-ordinating work related to the Alcohol Programme. Meetings of contact persons are arranged in the interests of more effective co-operation and exchange of information between the ministries. The Programme **steering group** monitors and assesses attainment of the main objectives. The Programme **co-ordination group** is responsible for co-ordinating local, regional and national level activities. At the regional level, co-ordination is the responsibility of the **State Provincial Offices**.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health supports action by the partners that is related to the Alcohol Programme by disseminating information and good practices, producing material and promoting collaboration. The Ministry provides the personnel and operating resources needed for such co-ordination and support work.

Further information on the Alcohol Programme

- *Government Resolution on Strategies in Alcohol Policy*. Brochures of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2003:6. (In Finnish, Swedish, English, Russian and Estonian.)
- *Alcohol Programme 2004–2007. Starting points for co-operation in 2004*. Publications of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2004:7. (In Finnish and in Swedish.)

The Alcohol Programme's materials are available free of charge to Programme partners. Further information, along with materials in electronic form, can be found in the Programme's web site.

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