Tackling binge drinking among 18-24 year olds

Drinkaware aims to change the UK’s drinking habits for the better. We promote responsible drinking and find innovative ways to challenge the national drinking culture to help reduce alcohol misuse and minimise alcohol-related harm.
From September 2009 when people walk down the street it will be difficult for them to miss the biggest ever campaign to tackle binge drinking among young adults. Every second phone box around the country will feature posters presenting tips for smarter drinking. This, among other activities targeting 18-24 year olds, marks the start of a five year campaign developed via a three way partnership with Drinkaware, the drinks industry and Government.

But why is it needed?
Research shows that six out of 10 young adults don't know the recommended daily unit guidelines. And most 18-24 year olds far exceed them regularly. For the most part drinking and getting drunk is seen as a lot of fun – but that doesn't mean there aren't downsides to a big night out. Failing over and being sick, memory loss, having to go home early or being refused entry or service all contribute to what young adults themselves see as a negative aspect of drinking that can cause regret and embarrassment the next day. A new campaign with the strapline 'Why let good times go bad?' targets these 'irresponsible shamefuls', the people who think twice about their behaviour after a heavy session and vow never to do it again.

Alcohol misuse and 18-24 year olds
Binge drinking and the wider British drinking culture are never far from the headlines. You only have to walk down a city street on a Friday night or Saturday morning to see the impact alcohol misuse can have on the local community, let alone the wider impact on society as a whole. Each year, alcohol misuse for all ages costs the NHS around £2.7 billion, although the wider cost to society including crime and disorder, social and family breakdown and sickness absence is estimated at closer to £25.1 billion. Alcohol misuse among adults under 25 is of particular concern, with a new Drinkaware survey showing three out of 10 18-24 year olds (30%) drink to get drunk when they go out.

Even if young adults don't go out specifically to get drunk, it can be easy for them to get carried away and lose track of how much they're drinking. More than half of 18-24 year olds surveyed by YouGov (55%) admitted they don't keep track of how much they're drinking when they’re out. If they’re not keeping track, it can be difficult to recognise when a good night can take a turn for the worse.

Research also shows that:

49,300 people aged 16-24 were admitted to hospital in England and Wales in 2007/08 due to alcohol-related causes.

Over a third (34%) of 18-24 year olds drink nine or more units when drinking socially. For both men and women this is more than double the daily unit guidelines. 18-24 year olds drink more units in an average session compared to any other age group.

How can young adults change their drinking behaviour?
Binge drinking isn’t a new phenomenon – it is a long-term issue and tackling it effectively will not happen overnight. Among 18-24 year olds, quiet nights are in the minority with most nights ending up as ‘big nights’. Going straight to the pub after work, buying rounds and drinking shots are all seen as part of a big night out, but they are also identified as the usual causes of any embarrassing drunken behaviour. Getting drunk cheaply at home before heading out to a pub or club is also common practice.

Tackling binge drinking will require a cultural shift. But in the meantime there are ways young adults can ensure what and how much they’re drinking doesn’t get the better of them. Practical things like eating a meal, pacing alcoholic drinks with water or soft drinks, looking after your mates and planning your journey home will all help to avoid letting a good night out go bad. But that’s just the first step.

Changing culture will mean changing attitudes to the social acceptability of drunkenness. And changing attitudes starts with knowledge and education. Making
sure people have all the facts can help them to make informed decisions.

The YouGov survey of 18-24 year olds in July 2009 found that one in three young adults (32%) claims they don’t need advice about alcohol. This is despite the fact that in the last 12 months, almost one in four (23%) have been ashamed of their appearance when drunk, 25% have not known how they got home, nearly one third (31%) have blacked out, one in 10 (9%) have been in a fight and just under half (48%) have vomited due to drinking too much.

Although young adults think they know everything there is to know about alcohol, research shows that they are open to practical advice, as long as it is delivered in a non-lecturing way and they don’t have to go out of their way to find it.

That’s why Drinkaware, in partnership with the drinks industry and Government, came up with the following messages and posters which will be on half the phone boxes around the country, a third of them within 150 metres of a bar, pub or club and over half within 150 metres of a retailer selling alcohol. Posters and other campaign materials including drink mats and mirror stickers will also be available in 16,000 pubs, bars or clubs.

**The Campaign for Smarter Drinking – how it came about**

In early 2008 representatives from the drinks industry were invited to Number 10 to discuss the need for a cross-industry approach to tackle the problem of binge drinking among 18-24s. The result was 46 drinks-industry related companies coming together to form the Campaign for Smarter Drinking. Working in partnership with Government and the independent charity Drinkaware, the campaign is designed to challenge current attitudes to the social acceptability of drunkenness, particularly among young adults, and to contribute to a reduction in drunken behaviour among young adults and its harmful social and health consequences.

The campaign is led by Drinkaware – as an independent charity it is recognised as the consumer’s friend and a credible source of information. Previous Drinkaware campaigns have been shown to encourage people to rethink their drinking patterns.

This £100 million social responsibility activity is a landmark campaign. Nowhere in the world have so many parties come together to tackle binge drinking. The drinks industry, Government and Drinkaware working together provides a solid foundation for presenting smarter drinking messages to young adult drinkers.

**Campaign creatives**

46% don’t drink water or soft drinks to pace themselves when they’re out drinking.

Of the 18-24 year olds who don’t eat before they go out, nearly one in three (30%) said it was because they wouldn’t get drunk as quickly.

One in five 18-24 year olds (17%) have had a one night stand after drinking in the last 12 months.

More than three quarters (77%) of young adults don’t like it when their friends get too drunk and end up being a burden.
The campaign at a glance

- 45 drinks industry related companies on board.
- Staff in pubs, off licences and supermarkets up and down the country educated in alcohol awareness.
- One in two UK phone boxes showing one of four campaign posters promoting: ‘free pints all night’ – ask your bar staff for a drink of water; ‘start your night with a bite’ – eating isn’t cheating; ‘sparkling wit’ – save face by drinking water; and ‘beer goggles’ – stay focused by pacing your drinks.
- Pubs and bars nationwide will display posters, drink mats and mirror stickers, carrying the campaign’s ‘why let good times go bad?’ logo.
- Supermarkets and other retailers of alcohol will present the campaign message on posters, shelf strips and fridge stickers.
- 13 million alcohol products including neck labels on bottles, cans and multi-packs will feature the campaign logo.

Who’s involved?

Tackling binge drinking in this country requires a fundamental change in the culture which surrounds alcohol. We all have a part to play – individuals, parents, Government, the health community, charities and the drinks industry.

That’s why an alliance of alcohol producers and retailers has come together to form the Campaign for Smarter Drinking, and today announces a major social marketing campaign, working in partnership with Government and the independent charity Drinkaware.

More than 45 businesses have joined forces to run a £100 million campaign over 5 years to challenge people to think anew about their drinking habits.

Our aim is simple: to change attitudes towards drunkenness and encourage more responsible drinking.

Despite overall alcohol consumption falling and retailers having made significant progress to stop under 18s buying alcohol, binge drinking by 18-30 year olds remains an issue that affects us all. We believe we can help alter our drinking culture for the better.

Our campaign will not work alone, it has to complement other, coordinated efforts from stakeholders. It will not do it by talking down to young adults or telling them what to do. Past experience shows this does not work. We will focus on young adults to make sure they have the facts, so if they choose to drink they can encourage each other to do so sensibly, as part of a balanced healthy lifestyle, rather than to excess.

The question the campaign asks is ‘why let good times go bad?’ The answer will come from young adults in the weeks, months and years to come.
What one 18 year old said:

“I don’t really drink that much on a night out because I can’t afford it. Sometimes I’ll drink before I go out so that I can get that nice tipsy feeling, and then maybe have one or two drinks when I’m out to keep it going. We tend to go to the pub before going on to a club because drinks are cheaper that way or we go to a club that has cheap drinks deals early on, then stop drinking when it gets more expensive. I tend to go out about once a week and being drunk just makes a night better– everyone is in a better mood. To be honest though none of my friends really get that drunk– we got it out of our system when we were younger, drinking at people’s parties. Saying that, one of my (girl) friends once got so drunk she punched a guy at a party. We think she was trying to be playful but she ended up hitting him so hard it made his nose bleed.”

Izzy (from Maidstone, Kent)

Months and years ahead

Over the next five years Drinkaware will work with major employers, social networks, clubs and colleges to deliver messages to young adults. The campaign will build on and complement the work Drinkaware has been doing since it started three years ago. 18-24 year old young adults are a key target audience and we’ll be providing lots of practical tips and advice so they can avoid letting good times go bad.

The financial and social impact of alcohol misuse affects everyone. Parents, teachers, health professionals, charities, the drinks industry and central and local governments all have a part to play in reducing the harm caused to young people by alcohol misuse.

About Drinkaware

Drinkaware provides consumers with information to make informed decisions about the effects of alcohol on their lives and lifestyles. Our public education programmes, grants, expert information and resources help create awareness and effect positive change. An independent charity established in 2007, Drinkaware works with the medical profession, the alcohol industry, Government and independent members to achieve its goals.

An independent, UK-wide charity, we are supported by voluntary donations from across the drinks industry to equip people with the knowledge they need to make decisions about how much they drink.

Drinkaware.co.uk has lots of practical advice and information for consumers including a unit calculator, drinks diary and health factsheets approved by our Chief Medical Adviser.

Unit guidelines

Drinkaware advises men to stay within the recommended guidelines of 3-4 units of alcohol per day (the equivalent of a pint and a half of lager) and women to stay within 2-3 units per day (the equivalent of a 175ml glass of wine or three standard vodkas).

References

1 All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2036 18-24 year olds in Great Britain. Fieldwork was undertaken between 31st July and 3rd August 2009. The survey was carried out online.
2 YouGov survey for Drinkaware, total sample size was 2253 adults 18+ in Great Britain, March 2009.
3 Cabinet Office, 2008
5 Mintel Oxygen, Binge Drinking, Special Report, June 2009

drinkaware.co.uk
for the facts about alcohol