

Public Health Alcohol Act – time for action

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Sir, – It is now two years (October 17th, 2018) since the enactment of the Public Health Alcohol Act.

While some aspects of the Act have been implemented, much remains to be done.

Many important measures, crucial to the objective of reducing alcohol use in Ireland, such as notice of licence grant or renewal; minimum unit pricing; the content of advertising; the labelling of alcohol products; and a broadcast watershed, have yet to be commenced by the Minister for Health.

The programme for government recognises that the Act has only been partly begun and that “longstanding” commitments needed to be honoured. The objective of this hard-fought legislative framework is to reduce alcohol use and harm, and aims to bring Ireland’s alcohol consumption down from 11 litres per capita to 9.1 litres. What is required now is a firm timeline that commits to the implementation, in full, of the suite of measures whose effectiveness relies on a coherent and cohesive action.

We appreciate the challenge of managing the enormity of a public health crisis such as Covid-19, which has derailed much of the Government’s ambition.

However, every day that delays these measures being introduced can be counted in lives unnecessarily lost.

In two years since enactment, the Global Burden of Diseases Study estimates over 5,500 people have died from alcohol-related illnesses and incidents in Ireland.

The annual public cost of this social and economic impact remains enormous at €3.6 billion, especially at a time when the exchequer struggles for resources.

We, as members of the Alcohol Health Alliance Ireland, are united in our commitment to efficacy of these measures.

Implemented, they will undoubtedly achieve better public health outcomes, and so we implore the Taoiseach, the Government and the Minister for Health to proceed, without further delay. – Yours, etc,

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