On 27th August 2015, Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP) and Holyrood Communications held a conference on Alcohol and Young People in the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow. Policymakers, people who work with young people and young people themselves came together to discuss the findings of SHAAP’s 2014 Alcohol and the Developing Adolescent Brain: Evidence Review and to make recommendations about next steps.

Recommendations from the SHAAP report were:

1. Protecting young people from alcohol-related harm has to be within the context of a ‘whole-population’ approach to reduce overall alcohol consumption.

2. Protecting young people from alcohol-related harm should be embedded in national and local policy.

3. Emerging evidence that the adolescent brain may be especially vulnerable to alcohol harms should inform all health-promoting activities.

4. Emerging evidence that the adolescent brain may be especially vulnerable to alcohol harms should prompt investment in further explanatory research.

Recommendations from the conference delegates were:

Whole population approaches – Delegates suggested there was a need for:

- Action to address the social acceptability and cultural embeddedness of alcohol.
- Greater awareness of cultural differences between different regions in Scotland when developing policy.
- Clear and consistent messaging around education, television advertising, and for parents and teenagers, with the latter group acknowledging how alcohol affects them, as they are still developing.
- The licensing system to be used to further restrict availability of alcohol.
- Minimum Unit Pricing and complementary pricing policies to get cheap alcohol off the market.
- Total ban on advertising, including sports sponsorship and tighter restrictions on advertising on social media.
- Greater and more effective dissemination of information and messaging through available resources.
- De-stigmatisation of having an alcohol problem and greater access to and availability of support services at the point of need.
- Policy learning from other countries, understanding what worked and why, and apply these lessons to Scotland.

Protecting young people – Delegates suggested there was a need for:

- Involvement of young people in policy decisions through co-design, co-creation and co-production of policies and services for young people.
- An enhanced role for education through, for example, early intervention and proactive messaging from a young age.
- Development of a consistent national approach to education through schools (more school based interventions) and educational establishments.
- Minimum Unit Pricing and other pricing policies to get cheap alcohol off the market.
- Messaging that is positive and credible for young people.
- Promotion of healthy behaviours.
- Stricter guidelines on the sale of alcohol to young people.
- Further restrictions on and greater regulation of advertising, sports sponsorship and events to which young people are exposed.

Communications re adolescent vulnerability - Delegates suggested there was a need for:

- A cultural shift and change in social norms for young people away from ‘everyone drinks and it’s okay’.
- Increase in the availability of up-to-date, relevant knowledge and information on alcohol for young people.
- More use of new media to get messages out to young people.
- Information to make parents aware of adolescent drinking and associated vulnerabilities through, for example, more information at parents’ evenings, education in the workplace, and greater focus on the consequences of drinking.
- Information for young people on short-term consequences of (harmful) alcohol consumption, which may be more effective than messages about long-term impacts.
- Information for young people on alcohol industry activities, especially on social media.
- Adults to model out in their own alcohol-related behaviours options that young people have.

Research - Delegates suggested there was a need for research about:

- Effects of drink driving legislation.
- Effect of the smoking ban on limiting sales.
• ‘Sub groups’ drinking patterns; types and strength of alcohol drunk; frequency of consumption; and their motivations for drinking (moderating factors vs risks).
• Motivations of young abstainers.
• How to identify young people at high risk as early as possible.
• Long-term impacts of alcohol on neuro-development.
• Young people’s patterns and places of drinking.
• How useful is self-reported data?
• Best ways to engage the most socially marginalised young people.

Contributors to the discussions included Dr Bruce Ritson (SHAAP), Dr Rachel McAdams (NHS Health Scotland), John Holleran (Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs), Alison Hardie, Laura Caven and Keira Anderson (Young Scot and Snook), and Eric Carlin (SHAAP). The conference was chaired by the Children’s Commissioner, Tam Baillie, and included a key-note address by the Chief Medical Officer for Scotland, Dr Catherine Calderwood.

Papers are available as follows:
SHAAP – Alcohol and the Developing Adolescent Brain: Evidence Review

Presentations
Alcohol and the Developing Adolescent Brain
Dr Bruce Ritson

Young people and the impact of a significant other’s drinking
John Holleran

Young People and Alcohol: trends and inequalities
Dr Rachel McAdams

Working with young people to address the challenge of alcohol misuse
Young Scot

Young People and Alcohol: Some emerging Themes from a Case Study in Pilton, Edinburgh
Eric Carlin

Alcohol Harm and Young People
Dr Catherine Calderwood

Who we are
SHAAP was set up by the Scottish Medical Royal Colleges and Faculties, through their Scottish Intercollegiate Group (SIGA) and is governed by an Executive Committee made up of members of the Royal Colleges. It is hosted by the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, a charity registered in Scotland no. SC009465.

We work closely with a range of organisations including the Scottish Government, NHS Health Scotland, Alcohol Focus Scotland, The BMA Scotland and leading academics.

Our key personnel
Dr Peter Rice
Chair of the SHAAP Executive Committee
peter.rice@nhs.net

Eric Carlin
Director
shaap.director@rcpe.ac.uk

Jennifer Fingland
Policy Officer
shaap@rcpe.ac.uk

Our vision
SHAAP provides a co-ordinated, coherent and authoritative medical voice on the need to reduce the impact of alcohol related harm on the health and wellbeing of the people of Scotland.

Our aims
• To raise awareness and understanding of alcohol-related health problems with health practitioners, policy makers and the public.
• To evaluate current research and identify strategies to reduce alcohol-related health damage based on the best available evidence
• To work together with key organisations in the alcohol field in Scotland, the rest of the UK and worldwide, in tackling alcohol misuse.

Contact us
Email: shaap@rcpe.ac.uk
Tel: 0131 247 3667
Twitter @SHAAPALCOHOL