

An Taoiseach, Michael Martin T.D.

Roinn An Taoisigh

Government Buildings

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1<sup>st</sup> July, 2025

**By Email:** [taoiseach@taoiseach.gov.ie](mailto:taoiseach@taoiseach.gov.ie).

**Subject:** Protecting Public Health – Urgent Need to Maintain Alcohol Labelling Timeline

A Thaoisigh, A Chara

The Irish Heart Foundation wishes to express serious concern regarding any potential delay to the introduction of alcohol health warning labels, currently planned for May 2026.

We, along with many other health organisations, view alcohol labelling as a vital public health measure. These labels are not only about consumer rights but are a critical step toward addressing the high burden of alcohol-related disease in Ireland and protecting future generations. We strongly urge you to champion this issue in the public interest.

Ireland continues to face significant challenges from alcohol-related harm and rising obesity rates, both key drivers of cardiovascular disease. The Health Research Board reports that alcohol is a factor in over 200 disease and injury conditions, leading to a substantial number of hospitalisations and deaths each year. Harmful alcohol use remains a critical concern, and without stronger regulation of alcohol marketing and clearer health information for the public, this burden will only grow.

The legislation for alcohol labelling was passed in 2018 following broad political and public support, with over 70% of the Irish public in favour. These labels are essential to ensure consumers are properly informed about serious health risks including cancer, liver disease, and harm during pregnancy, risks that remain widely unknown or misunderstood. Ireland has the third highest global prevalence of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), with an estimated 6,000 babies affected annually, making warning labels an urgent public health necessity. The Irish Heart Foundation urges the Government to strengthen rather than omit health warnings, particularly highlighting alcohol's impact on cardiovascular disease, which accounts for approximately 30% of all deaths in Ireland.

Attempts by the alcohol industry to block or weaken labelling regulations are part of a long-running campaign to deny the scale of alcohol-related harm and undermine evidence-based policymaking. Public health experts and the WHO have been clear on this point. As the WHO's Global Action Plan

(2022–2030) states: *“Strong international leadership is needed to counter interference from commercial interests in alcohol policy development and implementation in order to prioritise the public health agenda for alcohol”.*

Ireland has a proud history of public health leadership. Just as the smoking ban inspired global change, our stance on alcohol labelling can set an international standard. Any postponement or weakening of the labelling regulations would undermine public health goals.

Reducing alcohol harm is not just a health priority it is an economic necessity. Alcohol costs the health service around 11% of its budget, and the wider cost to the State is estimated at €12 billion annually. In contrast, alcohol excise duties raise only €1.2 billion. Delaying action simply passes the cost to families, communities and the health system.

We urge you to support the timely introduction of alcohol health warning labels to ensure the public receives clear and evidence-based information rather than industry spin. The alcohol industry should have no role in shaping public health policy, especially when the cost of harm falls on individuals, families and the State.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like further information or assistance.

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**Emma Balmaine**  
**Chief Executive Officer**