

A Comprehensive City-Region Wide Alcohol Harms Strategy for Greater Manchester

What is it?

Alcohol harm is a daily reality across Greater Manchester — contributing to illness, distress, and deepening health inequalities, while placing significant strain on already stretched public services. At the same time, the alcohol industry continues to profit from cheap, widespread availability, often concentrated in communities already facing disadvantage. Those most affected are frequently the least likely to access timely support or treatment.

In response, Greater Manchester has developed a bold, city-region-wide strategy focused not only on addressing harm but preventing it. Rooted in prevention, compassion, and community, the strategy aims to tackle the deeper causes of alcohol-related challenges and create lasting change.

Greater Manchester's vision is simple but ambitious: a city-region free from alcohol harm. Together, we are committed to leading the way—supporting individuals, families, and communities to live healthier, safer lives.

What was the timeline?

The strategy underwent an extensive 16-month co-design process, incorporating data analysis, system-wide engagement, lived experience input, ongoing review, and multiple panels for check, challenge, and final approval.

The strategy will launch in July 2025, building on ongoing work across Greater Manchester to reduce alcohol-related harm. It is underpinned by local authority delivery plans and led by the newly established Greater Manchester Alcohol Harms Alliance.

The Alliance is responsible for driving the implementation of the A SAFER GM model, coordinating activity across its eight components, and supporting both GM-wide and local plans. It provides assurance and regular progress reporting to the NHS GM Population Health Committee, while offering system-wide leadership and accountability by connecting and strengthening local alcohol harm alliances across the region.

How did it happen?

The strategy was developed through a collaborative process involving a wide range of Greater Manchester stakeholders, including GMP Health Leadership Group (GMPHLG),

Drug & Alcohol Commissioners, NHS Trusts, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), Police and Probation services, Alcohol Care Teams, and specialist providers such as Early Break, Change Grow Live, and Turning Point.

A thorough analysis and synthesis of existing alcohol harm data informed the process, including commissioned research by Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) that examined underlying factors influencing alcohol and drug use among young people, as well as barriers to treatment for alcohol-dependent adults across the city-region.

To maintain momentum, a monthly Greater Manchester Alcohol Steering Group was established, bringing together representatives from all ten local authorities, NHS trusts, and commissioners to guide ongoing strategy development.

The voices of those with lived experience and in recovery, were actively captured and embedded at the core of the strategy, ensuring it reflects community needs.

Approval of the strategy was secured through a series of formal governance bodies, including Greater Manchester Public Health Leadership Group, the Greater Manchester Drugs and Alcohol Transformation Board, the Public Health Advisory Group and the Population Health Committee. The strategy will go for final approval with the NHS GM ICB board in July 2025.

This structured approach ensured alignment, accountability, and commitment across the region.

Who was involved?

The development and ongoing implementation of the Greater Manchester alcohol harms strategy has been shaped through close collaboration with a broad group of system partners. Key stakeholders have included NHS Greater Manchester population health, Directors of Public Health and public health teams, local authority alcohol commissioners, NHS and community alcohol support providers, GMCA, Police and Probation services and representatives from planning, licensing, and the VCFSE sector.

This cross-sector partnership continues through the Greater Manchester Alcohol Harms Alliance, which leads the delivery of the strategy.

How did you involve the community?

Community mobilisation is at the core of Greater Manchester's approach to tackling alcohol harm. In 2020 and 2022, we led one of the largest alcohol consultations in the country — The Big Alcohol Conversation — which highlighted how deeply embedded

alcohol is in our social culture, often creating pressure to drink and reinforcing it as ‘the norm’.

The voices of people with lived experience have played a vital role in shaping this strategy, ensuring it reflects real experiences and needs. Their perspectives are embedded throughout, helping to challenge stigma, influence service design, and drive a cultural shift in how we understand and respond to alcohol harm.

As part of our GM Live Well approach, we are committed to continuing community mobilisation efforts - prioritising peer support, activating local networks, and empowering the VCFSE sector to play a central role in sustainable, community-led recovery.

What were the challenges and how were they overcome?

Developing and delivering a city-regional alcohol harm strategy in the absence of a national framework presents significant challenges. The lack of dedicated national policy and sustained funding limits local capacity and long-term planning.

Bringing together a wide range of stakeholders across health, local government, policing, licensing, and the voluntary sector requires time, coordination, and strong leadership to align priorities.

Data limitations can also make it harder to build a clear, shared picture of alcohol-related harm across the city-region.

What have you learnt?

The strategy has been positively received across the system, with strong support from partners, localities, and several Greater Manchester Boards. Its collaborative development has built a shared sense of ownership and momentum for delivery.

What next?

To track impact and progress, a performance matrix is now in development, led by the Greater Manchester Alcohol Harms Alliance, which will provide a clear framework for evaluating success and driving continuous improvement.