

Wigan Communities in Charge of Alcohol

What is it?

Communities in Charge of Alcohol (CICA) is a targeted community engagement and training programme designed to reduce alcohol-related harm and health inequalities. Focused on areas experiencing high levels of alcohol harm and significant social and economic deprivation, the initiative trains local volunteers as Alcohol Health Champions (AHCs).

The programme operates on two levels:

- 1) Individual level – by equipping AHCs to deliver brief interventions, offer alcohol-related advice, and signpost individuals to specialist support services.
- 2) Community level – by empowering residents to influence local alcohol availability and licensing decisions.

AHCs are trained to:

- Hold informal conversations about alcohol and health.
- Deliver brief advice to people in their communities.
- Support individuals in reducing alcohol consumption or seeking help.
- Engage with the public at local events to raise awareness.
- Help communities participate in the alcohol licensing process.
- Advocate for reducing alcohol availability in the local area.
- By enabling peer-led conversations and action, CICA fosters community-wide change, helping to create healthier environments and reduce alcohol-related harm.

How did it happen?

In 2017, the GMCA entered into a partnership with the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) to develop training for and introduce alcohol health champions (AHCs) in all 10 GM local authority areas. Wigan, Bolton, and Bury continue to implement and sustain the initiative.

The Communities in Charge of Alcohol (CICA) programme marked the first time Greater Manchester (GM) coordinated a unified approach to building health champion capacity across all 10 local authorities. This collaboration was driven by the GM Health and

Social Care Strategic Partnership as part of its commitment to a 'Radical Upscale in Prevention', one of four priority areas within the 'GM Taking Charge' strategy. The programme was supported by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and reflected a region-wide effort to tackle alcohol-related harm through community empowerment.

Who was involved?

A critical element of the programme was the strong partnership between Local Authority Licensing Teams and delivery partners. Licensing officers contributed to the two-day training, helping AHCs understand how to influence licensing decisions and reduce alcohol harm at a local level. This multi-agency approach—linking local authorities, the GMCA, training providers, and community networks—was essential to the programme's success in embedding prevention at the heart of local public health.

Key stakeholders included:

- Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) – strategic oversight and coordination
- GM Health and Social Care Partnership – strategic direction and funding
- Local Authorities – local implementation, recruitment, coordination, and delivery
- Public Health Teams – programme design and integration with local health priorities
- Licensing Teams – delivery of training and community engagement on licensing processes
- Community Organisations and Volunteers – local delivery, participation, and sustainability
- Training Providers – design and delivery of AHC training

How did you involve the community?

The Communities in Charge of Alcohol (CICA) intervention was built on a foundation of community mobilisation, using an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach. From the outset, the focus was on identifying and strengthening existing community assets—skills, relationships, and networks—to support health and wellbeing. In line with NICE behaviour change guidance, the programme gave communities time to recognise their strengths, rebuild confidence, and take ownership of local action. By enabling residents to lead and showing that their involvement could

drive real change, CICA built trust, strengthened engagement, and created a sustainable, community-led response to alcohol harm.

What were the challenges and how were they overcome?

A key challenge in implementing the CICA programme is ensuring that all stakeholders clearly understand the place-based role, its scope, and its purpose within the wider health and community context. Providers and commissioned services must also be clear on their responsibilities, expected outcomes, and have the capacity to support volunteers who may have little prior experience with alcohol or health issues. Early engagement at the community level is essential to build awareness, trust, and support before formal implementation begins. Recruitment requires a well-resourced, multi-channel strategy—using digital platforms, community influencers, print materials, and word-of-mouth—to effectively reach and involve local residents. Finally, sustained support for new Alcohol Health Champions is vital, particularly in areas of high need where confidence and literacy levels may be low, requiring ongoing mentoring to build skills and maintain engagement.

What has been the impact?

In its first year, the Communities in Charge of Alcohol (CICA) programme trained 123 Alcohol Health Champions (AHCs) across Greater Manchester. These champions engaged in over 1,100 brief conversations with family, friends, colleagues, and community members about alcohol and health. They played a vital role in raising awareness, signposting individuals to relevant support services, and helping others better understand the risks associated with alcohol use.

An evaluation of the initial roll-out—delivered across nine of Greater Manchester’s ten local authorities—highlighted the wide-reaching impact of the programme, including:

- 249 AUDIT-C assessments completed by AHCs to help identify increasing risk drinking behaviours
- 65 community events held to promote alcohol awareness and support local engagement
- 77% of AHCs were community volunteers with little or no prior experience in public health, who were successfully trained to recognise high-risk alcohol use and provide brief interventions.

Beyond health outcomes, many AHCs reported personal benefits, including increased confidence, a renewed sense of purpose, and enhanced social value. Several

participants also progressed into employment, education, or further training as a direct result of their involvement in the programme.

CICA remains the first initiative of its kind in the UK to take a community-led, asset-based approach to reducing alcohol harm.

Further information

Communities in Charge of Alcohol – [Centre for Applied Health Research](#)

Communities in Charge of Alcohol – [Evaluation](#)

Royal Society of Public Health – [Communities in Charge of Alcohol](#)

The University of Salford - [CICA toolkit](#)