

Availability, Immediacy, and Commercialisation of Alcohol Increase Harm: A Health Professional Perspective on Proposals to Legalise Domestic Online Sales in Iceland

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The European Health Alliance on Alcohol (EHA), a coalition of 27 European and national health organizations representing over 2 million medical professionals and healthcare providers, expresses its strong concern regarding proposals to legalize domestic online alcohol sales in Iceland.

The proposed changes are presented as a measure to address regulatory inconsistencies and modernise retail systems. However, they would significantly increase the availability of alcohol, particularly through rapid, on-demand delivery, and will, therefore, lead to higher levels of consumption and increased alcohol-related harms. These concerns are particularly salient given emerging evidence of increasing alcohol-related hospitalisations and liver disease in Iceland.

A health professional perspective: availability, immediacy, and commercialisation increase harm

From the perspective of health professionals, the proposed introduction of domestic online alcohol sales is incompatible with established principles of public health. Alcohol is a toxic, psychoactive, carcinogenic, teratogenic and addictive substance. Across clinical and public health practice, policies are assessed based on their capacity to reduce exposure to such risk factors, prevent harm, and alleviate pressure on health systems, particularly in light of increasing alcohol-related hospital admissions observed in Iceland.¹ The proposed model would both increase availability and fundamentally transform access to alcohol in Iceland, from regulated, time-limited retail to immediate, on-demand delivery.

This proposed shift introduces new risk dynamics, including:

- the ability to order alcohol during ongoing drinking occasions, even late at night;
- delivery to private settings without the safeguards present in licensed premises;
- challenges in verifying age and intoxication at the point of delivery;

¹ <https://www.laeknabladid.is/tolublod/2026/03/rannsokn.-afengistengdum-innlognum-a-landspitalann-hefur-fjolgad-mikid-a-sidustu-arum>

- increased exposure among vulnerable populations, including young people and individuals with alcohol dependence^{2 3}.

Implementing a policy that facilitates continuous and rapid access to a harmful product such as alcohol runs counter to the duty of governments to protect and promote health of citizens.

Online Alcohol Sales: A Structural Expansion of Availability with Predictable Harms

Evidence-based data consistently demonstrate a direct link between increased alcohol availability and higher levels of consumption and harm. Traditionally, this relationship has been observed in the context of extended opening hours and greater outlet density.

Online alcohol sales represent a new and more intensive form of availability, characterised by the removal of physical access barriers, reduced effort and increased convenience for consumers, the potential for aggressive commercial practices—including targeted marketing and promotions—and the expansion of purchasing opportunities beyond regulated hours.

Crucially, unlike cross-border online purchases, which are limited by delivery times and logistical barriers, domestic online sales would enable near-immediate access, significantly amplifying their impact on consumption patterns and harm.

This is particularly concerning in a context where alcohol-related morbidity and mortality indicators have increased in recent years⁴.

European Health Alliance on Alcohol (EHAAL) Recommendation

Given the consistent and well-established evidence that increasing alcohol availability leads to increased harm, EHAAL calls on the Government of Iceland to **reject proposals to legalise domestic online alcohol sales**.

Policies that increase the speed, convenience, and frequency of alcohol access are incompatible with the core duty of governments to protect population health and reduce preventable harm.

Instead, EHAAL urges Iceland to:

- maintain and protect its public health-oriented retail monopoly
- strengthen enforcement of existing legislation regarding illegal online sales

² <https://www.laeknabladid.is/tolublod/2023/11/nr/8450>

³ <https://www.laeknabladid.is/tolublod/2026/03/ritstjornargrein.-afengistengdum-innlognum-a-landspitala-fjolgar-jafnt-og-thett.-engilbert-sigurdsson>

⁴ Iceland mortality data (ICD-10), 1996–2024.

- ensure that digital developments do not undermine effective alcohol control policies

EHAAL stands ready to support Iceland in advancing evidence-based, high-impact alcohol policies that protect health and reinforce the sustainability of health systems.

About the European Health Alliance on Alcohol (EHAAL)

The **European Health Alliance on Alcohol (EHAAL)** is a coalition of 27 European and national health organisations representing over **2 million medical professionals and healthcare providers**. EHAAL works to reduce alcohol-related harm across Europe through evidence-based advocacy, education, and engagement with policymakers.

Members of European Health Alliance on Alcohol (EHAAL)

European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL)
European Renal Association (ERA)
United European Gastroenterology (UEG)
European Psychiatric Association (EPA)
European Geriatric Medicine Society (EuGMS)
European Medical Students' Association (EMSA)
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European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (ESPGHAN)
European Society of Radiology (ESR)
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European Society for Clinical Nutrition and Metabolism (ESPEN)
Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL)
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International Society of Addiction Medicine (ISAM)
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