North Yorkshire tackles alcohol abuse

A county-wide strategy for tackling alcohol abuse has been published by public health experts in North Yorkshire during the national Dry January campaign, which encourages people who drink alcohol to stop for 31 days following New Year.

The strategy’s aim is to work with partner organisations “to reduce the harm caused by alcohol to individuals, families, communities and businesses in North Yorkshire while ensuring that people are able to enjoy alcohol responsibly.” It is based on the findings of an extensive public consultation process which ran during the spring and summer this year. The strategy aims to change North Yorkshire’s irresponsible drinking culture by encouraging communities, businesses and partner organisations to work with the County Council to reduce the harm from alcohol.

“In North Yorkshire, although around one in seven adults abstains from alcohol, around a quarter of all people who drink are estimated to be drinking at harmful or hazardous levels,” said County Councillor Don Mackenzie, Executive Member for Public Health and Prevention.

“Alcohol-related hospital admissions are increasing year on year, and nearly 200 people die in North Yorkshire every year as a result of alcohol. It is associated with crime, including domestic violence and sexual crime, and features in antisocial behaviour in particular with over a quarter of incidents associated with alcohol in some areas.”

As well as supporting national campaigns like Dry January, the strategy’s initiatives include working with businesses to encourage sensible drinking; running local awareness raising campaigns and activities about the harm alcohol can do and the importance of sensible drinking. The County Council also funds North Yorkshire Horizons, a service which provides treatment and recovery support across the county for adults with drug and alcohol misuse and dependence issues.

The alcohol strategy’s targets are to:

- support schools to make pupils aware of the risks of alcohol abuse
- support the development of specialist services in areas where professionals come regularly into contact with people suffering the consequences of excessive alcohol consumption
- increase the uptake and ensure the effectiveness of the GP-led NHS Health Checks to identify people in the 40-74 age range at risk of harm from alcohol
- explore the feasibility of a minimum price of alcohol
- explore the feasibility of increasing the availability and reducing the price of non-alcoholic drinks in licensed premises
The Council will also work with trading standards officers and the Police to tackle under age sales, illegal imports of alcohol, and selling drinks to people who are already intoxicated.

Dr Lincoln Sargeant, Director of Public Health for North Yorkshire said “For too many people, harmful or hazardous drinking has become normal. We need to shift that culture so that low risk drinking becomes the norm. This is so right across a person’s life, from pregnancy and foetal development, through teenage years, young adulthood and leaving home, to the stresses of work and middle age and then retirement and risk of isolation in old age.”

Julia Mulligan, Police and Crime Commissioner for North Yorkshire said, “Alcohol-related harm can have a significant impact on people’s feelings of safety and during a recent survey conducted for my police and crime plan, 69% of responders said that tackling drug and alcohol problems was important to them as it had a negative impact on their feelings of safety. The effects on families and communities can also be devastating, so I am very keen to support this county wide strategy and look forward to working with partners in its delivery.”

The alcohol strategy can be downloaded from the North Yorkshire Partnership website www.nypartnerships.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=28432 There is also a short summary of the strategy as well as an easy read version. The strategy is part of the health prevention work the County Council is leading on, which includes developing strategies to support tobacco control; substance misuse and sexual health services; and helping sufferers from dementia and their families.

Ends

07-01-2015

Caption: The North Yorkshire Alcohol Strategy 2014-2019 has been developed by North Yorkshire County Council’s public health team working with partner organisations. Pictured from left to right: County Councillor Don Mackenzie, Executive Member for Public Health and Prevention, Julia Mulligan, Police and Crime Commissioner for North Yorkshire; Dr Lincoln Sargeant, Director of Public Health for North Yorkshire.

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