



Commercial Determinants of Health Webinar Report

Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (HADP)

18th March 2025

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Introduction

The Dahlgren Whitehead (1991) model depicts the Determinants of Health; the non-medical aspects of people's lives that influence health. This includes elements such as lifestyle, social and community networks, living and working conditions, and wider cultural and environmental influences.

Commercial Determinants of Health build on these, focusing on the ways in which private sector companies can impact our health in various ways; positive and negative.

As part of HADP's commitment to raising awareness of issues related to alcohol and substances impacting the health and wellbeing of Highland's communities, staff organised and hosted a series of webinars between 2024 and March 2025. This included a webinar exploring the Commercial Determinants of Health, advertised as follows:

"Discover how industries influence health outcomes at our upcoming webinar on the commercial determinants of health. Hear from key speakers, gain insights and explore solutions for healthier communities."

Session Structure

HADP were joined by speakers from a range of backgrounds, representing different organisations (see table). A total of 47 people attended the webinar (inc speakers), from a variety of organisations including The Highland Council, NHS Highland and the Scottish Drugs Forum.

Name	Organisation	Title	Presentation
Dr. Tim Allison	NHS Highland	Director of Public Health	https://www.highland-adp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Tim-Allison-NHS-

			Highland-Public-Health.pdf
Prof. Mark Pettigrew	London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Faculty of Public Health and Policy	Professor of Public Health and National Institute for Health and Care Research Public Health Policy Research Unity Director	Mark-Petticrew-London-School-of-Hygiene-Tropical-Medicine.pdf
Sheila Duffy	ASH Scotland	Chief Executive	Sheila-Duffy-ASH-Scotland.pdf
Alison Douglas	Alcohol Focus Scotland	Chief Executive	Alison-Douglas-Alcohol-Focus-Scotland.pdf
Katy MacLeod	Scottish Drugs Forum	Research and Peer Engagement Programme Manager	Katy-MacLeod-Scottish-Drugs-Forum.pdf
Mike Youatt	Inverness Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau	Gambling Support Service Training and Engagement Officer	Mike-Youatt-Citizens-Advice-Scotland-Gambling-Support-Service.pdf

The webinar was structured for each of the speakers to present in series. A question-and-answer function was enabled throughout the session to enable participants to ask questions throughout the session. Following the presentations, participants were split into four facilitated virtual breakout rooms with key questions centred around the practical application of content presented throughout the session:

1. What does this mean for us as individuals?
2. What does this mean for the people and communities we support in our work?
3. What could we do collectively to address this issue?

Facilitators reported on the key discussion points on behalf of their group prior to the summary, evaluation and closure of the event.

Breakout Room Summaries

1. What does this mean for us as individuals?

Participants identified how modern retail environments and marketing strategies can influence consumer behaviour, often in ways that undermine healthy choices. Some participants were able to identify how supermarkets prioritise space for ultra-processed foods and alcohol over healthier options, and how impulse buys like sugary snacks are strategically placed at checkouts. There was a recognition that marketing plays a powerful role, from celebrity endorsements to gendered and seasonal

advertising, shaping perceptions and normalising behaviours like drinking or unhealthy eating.

There was concern from some about the long-term consequences of these influences, especially as people may turn to substances like alcohol or gambling as coping mechanisms amid the rising cost of living.

Some participants reflected on cultural shifts, such as the decline of smoking in public and questioned whether new habits like vaping are replacing old ones.

One group emphasised the need for better communication and engagement to raise awareness and encourage more informed, health-conscious decisions.

2. What does this mean for the people and communities we support in our work?

Groups explored the complexities of promoting public health messages in environments heavily influenced by marketing, cultural norms, and economic pressures. One group identified the compromise many individuals and communities are faced with when the main source of employment is, for example, a distillery, and there are limited alternative employment opportunities. Equally the group identified that third sector organisations may face similar compromises given many funding schemes are rooted in the alcohol industry, but projects and programmes continue to require financial support to achieve their aims and objectives.

Participants identified the need for early, accessible, health messaging that responds to the concerns of communities. Participants also identified the need to remove stigma surrounding people's choices, understand the broader context of their decisions, and use education systems and community engagement to foster awareness and resilience. Participants also emphasised the importance of sensitivity when exploring individuals' health choices, especially when those choices are shaped by misleading marketing, for example, high-nicotine vapes appearing low-strength.

One group identified the role social media and sponsorships play in normalising harmful behaviours like vaping, gambling, and alcohol use, particularly amongst young people. Groups also highlighted the difficulty of pushing back against well-funded industries.

Finally, participants highlighted the impact of marketing and the availability of products on people who are in recovery.

3. What could we do collectively to address this issue?

Participants explored the complex challenges of addressing public health harms linked to commercial influences in relation to alcohol, vaping, unhealthy food, and gambling. Participants highlighted the need for consistent, community-based peer education, using informed clear and relatable messaging, and engaging approaches. Some participants identified that young people were key when considering where to start with educational opportunities. Others identified that the NHS was well positioned as a trusted voice, to deliver messaging and there was an opportunity to further develop this for the benefit of communities. In terms of methods, participants identified the importance of using social media effectively, as it continually evolves.

Participants identified the power and influence of industries in shaping behaviours through marketing, and the need to respond with bold action, including policy changes and better regulation of advertising and marketing. Participants also highlighted the need for regulation of transparency when considering, for example, funding of community projects.

Finally, participants also identified the need to engage communities at decision-making levels.

Evaluation

The following statements were posed to participants at the end of the session to gauge the impact of the webinar:

1. My knowledge and understanding on the Commercial Determinants of Health increased during this webinar.
2. I understand ways in which I can challenge the impact of the Commercial Determinants of Health.

A summary of the findings is included in the following table:

Question	Number of Respondents	Yes (%)	No (%)
My knowledge and understanding on the Commercial Determinants of Health increased during this webinar	26	100	0
I understand ways in which I can challenge the impact of the Commercial Determinants of Health	26	65	35

Participants were asked to score the webinar out of 5. Responses were gathered from 26 respondents. The average rating was 4.8 which suggests satisfaction with the webinar was

high, with all increasing knowledge and the majority understanding ways in which they could challenge the impact of commercial determinants of health.

Additionally, qualitative was gathered by asking respondents to complete the following statement, summarised in the image below:

- Choice is...



Most participants felt that choice is influenced.

Recommendations

Following the webinar, a series of recommendations in relation to the Commercial Determinants of Health have been produced for HADP to progress:

- Consider options for alcohol and substances peer-to-peer education for use by children and young people, families and communities in Highland
- Consider opportunities for NHS Highland to use its position as a trusted organisation to leverage behaviour change messaging with children, young people, families and communities in Highland
- Consider the role social media plays in health behaviour change messaging
- Adapt the way HADP uses social media to keep pace with changing public habits
- Involve communities in HADP decision making processes
- Raise awareness of evidence base, particularly in relation to alcohol and substances
- Raise awareness of industry tactics used in connection with alcohol and substances
- Review and update HADP's conflict-of-interest policy
- Resist the development of Community Alcohol Partnerships (CAPs) in Highland
- Encourage schools not to use industry funded materials
- Challenge normalisation of alcohol by:
 - Local action to restrict alcohol marketing on publicly – owned sites
 - Creating health promoting spaces and encourage alcohol free events and spaces

Appendices: Webinar Marketing Flyer

THE COMMERCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH WEBINAR

Discover how industries influence health outcomes at our upcoming webinar on the commercial determinants of health. Hear from key speakers, gain insights and explore solutions for healthier communities.

Speakers:

Tim Allison - NHS Highland
Mark Petticrew - London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
Sheila Duffy - ASH Scotland
Alison Douglas - Alcohol Focus Scotland
Katy MacLeod - Scottish Drugs Forum
Mike Youatt - Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau

Date: Tuesday 18th March 2025

Time: 9:30am-12:30pm

Book Here: <https://tinyurl.com/9eehacve>

