



## Draft media info

(Embargoed 12<sup>th</sup> May 2008)

### CORRIE STARS KICK OFF THE BIG DRINK DEBATE

The biggest ever survey on alcohol will be launched in the North West today in a bid to understand why the region has one of the biggest alcohol problems in the country.

Coronation Street actors were joined by the Region's Minister and Minister for Children, Young People and Families, Beverley Hughes MP, to kickstart the **Big Drink Debate** from the Region's most famous pub.

The Debate, being launched by Our Life in partnership with Government Office North West, will aim to identify how we use alcohol and to find out what people's views are on drinking and how it affects their health, safety and well being.

Alcohol costs the region dearly – it costs our health, our communities, our emergency services, our health services and our economy, with thousands of lost work days due to alcohol related illness.

An astonishing 73,000 crimes a year in the region (50,000 of them violent) are linked to alcohol and one person is admitted to a North West hospital every seven minutes with an alcohol related condition.

The Big Drink Debate will be looking to gather public opinion through its questionnaire during the three-month long campaign. This will provide greater understanding of people's drinking habits and attitudes towards alcohol.

Information from the questionnaire will help determine whether people feel more action needs to be taken on alcohol issues and to plan the most appropriate work with communities to make sure the next generation live longer, healthier lives.

The Minister said: "I am pleased to support this innovative approach. This is an exciting opportunity for the people of the North West to shape what action we could take to reduce levels of harmful drinking in our region. I encourage everyone to go online and fill in the questionnaire."

Dr Alison Giles, director of the Our Life programme, said: "The **Big Drink Debate** isn't a finger pointing exercise telling people they shouldn't be drinking, but a campaign which we hope will start a conversation around why we have such an unhealthy relationship with alcohol in this region.

"An anonymous questionnaire has been produced to help us understand people's drinking habits and attitudes towards alcohol and encourage the people of the North

West to think about why we drink; where we drink, and what might make us drink less. What people say will influence what we can all do together to change things now and in the years to come.”

Dr Ruth Hussey, Regional Director of Public Health added: “Our Life is a new programme set up by NHS North West to offer creative ways for the NHS, local government, the public, businesses and voluntary organisations to work in partnership to make sure that the NW becomes one of the healthiest regions in the country. We urge everyone in the North West to take part in the Big Drink Debate to help us kick-start this ambitious aim.”

To have your say in the Big Drink Debate, log onto [www.bigdrinkdebate.com](http://www.bigdrinkdebate.com) and fill out the anonymous questionnaire.

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#### NOTES TO EDITOR

- Our Life is a new region-wide programme which aims to shake off the NW's bad health and has been set up by NHS North West;
- Our Life will offer new ways for the NHS, the public, businesses and other sectors to work together and find creative ways of reaching people wherever they are and inspire them to make a change for the better;
- The first campaign for Our Life is to find out how people in the North West feel about their health and what their views are on alcohol;
- The North West has the worst drinking levels in the country for people drinking at hazardous or harmful levels;
- Deaths from alcohol-related causes have doubled in a generation;
- In the North West, around 43,000 men and 28,000 women are admitted to hospital every year for an alcohol-related condition. That's around one person every seven minutes;
- More than 73,000 recorded crimes across the North West last year were related to alcohol – of these 50,000 were violent offences;
- The estimated costs of alcohol-related and alcohol specific crime in England is £12billion;
- The most deprived 20% of people in the North West suffer the effects of alcohol the most;
- The questionnaire has been compiled by the North West Public Health Observatory, who will also be analysing the responses;
- The Big Drink Debate is being funded by Our Life and the Home Office.