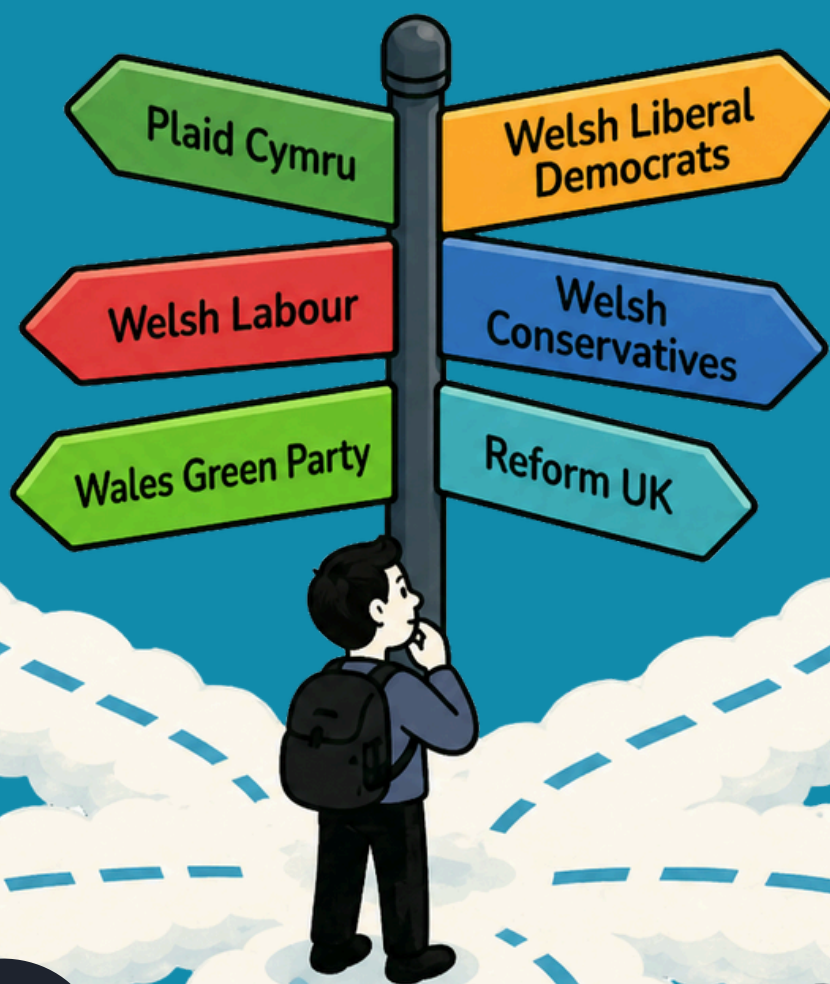


Choosing the Road to a Smoke-free Wales

A review of the 2026 Senedd manifestos through the lens of tobacco control and prevention



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A Message from Our Chief Executive

“Smoking remains Wales' single biggest preventable killer. Around 260,000 people in Wales still smoke, and tobacco continues to drive the health inequalities, NHS pressures and premature deaths that every party contesting the 2026 Senedd election has pledged to address.

As Wales' national voice on tobacco control, ASH Wales has reviewed the manifestos of all six major parties ahead of the May 7 election. Where parties have made explicit commitments on tobacco, we recognise these commitments. Where they have set ambitions on cancer, health inequalities, NHS waiting times, or prevention, we set out the evidence on why tackling smoking is essential to achieving these goals.

The next Welsh Government will inherit both a challenge and an opportunity. The Tobacco and Vapes Bill marks a generational shift in UK tobacco policy. Wales has a 2030 smoke-free ambition. The tools, the evidence and the public support are there. What is needed now is the political will to act.

ASH Wales is not here to tell people how to vote. We are here to ensure the case for bold, sustained action on smoking cannot be ignored by whoever forms the next Welsh Government. We stand ready to work with all parties, in government and in opposition, to make a smoke-free Wales a reality.”

Suzanne Cass.

Suzanne Cass, Chief Executive, ASH Wales



From Roadmap to Action



ASH Wales set out four priorities for the next Welsh Government: prevention, tackling inequality, innovation and co-production. This document builds on that work by looking at how those priorities are reflected across the 2026 Senedd manifestos.

Across all parties, there is clear recognition of the need to reduce pressure on the NHS, improve cancer outcomes and address health inequalities. These are shared ambitions. But without dedicated action on smoking, those ambitions will be harder to achieve.



Smoking remains the leading preventable cause of illness and early death in Wales. It is a major driver of cancer, cardiovascular disease, and inequality. Any serious approach to prevention must include tobacco control at its core.

This document reviews each party's manifesto through that lens, looking at:

- where commitments align with the Roadmap
- where opportunities exist to go further
- where key gaps remain



Across every manifesto, ASH Wales is looking for clear commitments to:

- reconvene the Tobacco Control Strategy Board and agree a new national implementation plan
- fully fund delivery of the Tobacco and Vapes Bill
- direct tobacco control funding to frontline services
- strengthen action on illegal tobacco and vapes
- embed partnership working across government, public health and the third sector



ASH Wales is not here to tell people how to vote. We are here to make clear that tackling smoking is essential to delivering the healthier, fairer Wales that all parties are aiming for.



The Welsh Conservatives

The Welsh Conservatives have included public health prominently in their manifesto, committing to new delivery plans for Wales' four biggest killers: cancer, heart disease, stroke and dementia, and to a Cancer Treatments Fund for life-saving treatments.

On smoking, their manifesto commits to:

- enhanced smoking cessation services using e-cigarettes
- community pharmacy as a vehicle for public health campaigns
- penalties for smoking in hospital grounds

Delivery plans for cancer, heart disease and stroke will only succeed if tobacco control sits at their core.

ASH Wales calls on a Welsh Conservative government to:

- fully fund a national tobacco control strategy
- reconvene the Tobacco Control Strategy Board
- embed quit support in the community settings where it is needed most
- direct Tobacco and Vapes Bill funding to frontline cessation services
- strengthen national action on illegal tobacco and vapes

A plan for Wales' biggest killers must include action on smoking, the leading preventable cause of many of those illnesses.



Welsh Liberal Democrats

The Welsh Liberal Democrats have put prevention at the heart of their health offer: a National Cancer Plan, a mid-life preventative health programme, investment in community services, and a National Food Strategy to tackle food poverty and improve nutrition.

But prevention without tobacco control has a significant gap at its centre. Smoking is the single biggest preventable cause of the cancers their National Cancer Plan commits to addressing, and a key driver of the NHS demand they want to reduce.

ASH Wales calls on a Welsh Liberal Democrat government to:

- embed tobacco control explicitly within the National Cancer Plan and preventative health programme
- tobacco and Vapes Bill consequential funding directed in full to frontline cessation services
- reconvene the Tobacco Control Strategy Board to agree a new fully-funded national implementation plan
- use their commitment to community pharmacy to embed quit support where it's needed most

A prevention programme that aims to reduce cancer and NHS pressure must include clear, funded action on smoking.

Plaid Cymru

Plaid Cymru's manifesto sets out an ambitious prevention agenda. A new Minister for Public Health with a cross-government remit, a root-and-branch Public Health Strategy, and a Cancer Plan prioritising prevention.

The explicit link drawn between poverty and poor health is important. The evidence is clear smoking is inextricably linked to poverty, and any serious efforts to lift people out of poverty that does not address tobacco will be incomplete.

Smoking is not explicitly referenced in the manifesto. Smoking is the single biggest preventable cause of cancer in Wales, and the leading driver of the cardiovascular disease and health inequalities their manifesto commits to tackling. A prevention strategy without an explicit tobacco control commitment leaves its most powerful lever unused.

ASH Wales calls on a Plaid Cymru government to:

- place tobacco control at the heart of its new Public Health Strategy
- direct Tobacco and Vapes Bill funding to frontline cessation services
- give the new Minister for Public Health a clear mandate to drive this work from day one
- recognise the link between smoking and poverty within wider anti-poverty policy
- reconvene the Tobacco Control Strategy Board and agree a new fully-funded national implementation plan

Efforts to reduce inequality must include action on smoking, a major cause of unequal health outcomes.





Reform UK Wales

Reform UK's manifesto commits to tackling preventable disease, stating that 75% of deaths under 75 in Wales are preventable. It proposes a cardiovascular prevention plan, a cancer survival strategy, a stroke awareness campaign and a dementia framework. Smoking is not referenced in the manifesto, despite its relevance to the conditions identified.

The manifesto's emphasis on enforcement and council licensing is noted. Tackling illegal tobacco and illicit vapes requires exactly this kind of robust enforcement and trading standards action - and it is an area where stronger action is long overdue.

ASH Wales calls on a Reform UK government to:

- place smoking at the centre of any prevention strategy and major killers plan
- urgently reconvene the Tobacco Control Strategy Board
- direct Tobacco and Vapes Bill consequential funding in full to cessation services
- commit to a fully-funded national strategy on illegal tobacco and vapes



Plans to cut preventable disease must include action on smoking, a leading cause of early death.

Welsh Labour

Welsh Labour's manifesto commits to launching a national lung cancer screening programme in 2027 - a significant step. Lung cancer is Wales' biggest cancer killer, and smoking is its primary cause.

The manifesto also signals appetite for regulatory action on public health: restricting energy drink sales to under-16s, limiting vape shop proliferation on high streets, and exploring planning powers around unhealthy food environments near schools. Welsh Labour's Marmot Nation commitment reflects that health inequalities demand structural responses.

But smoking does not appear by name in the manifesto. The lung cancer screening programme will reach people already harmed by tobacco. Without investment in cessation services and a renewed national tobacco control strategy, the conditions that make screening necessary will continue. Wales' previous tobacco control strategy expired in 2024 and has not been replaced.

ASH Wales calls on a Welsh Labour government to:

- urgently reconvene the Tobacco Control Strategy Board and agree a new fully-funded national implementation plan
- embed cessation support within the lung cancer screening programme from day one
- direct Tobacco and Vapes Bill consequential funding in full to tobacco control service delivery
- make tackling smoking central to the Marmot Nation and child poverty agendas - where the evidence demands it

Improving population health must include action on smoking, the leading preventable cause of illness.

Wales Green Party

The Wales Green Party explicitly references the Smoke Free Wales 2030 ambition in their manifesto: committing to continue the drive toward it as part of a fully funded National Cancer Strategy.

Their manifesto also commits to a national lung cancer screening programme, a Marmot Nation approach to health inequalities, clean indoor air standards, WHO air quality targets and a prevention-first health system. These commitments reflect what drives poor health in Wales.

But commitment without a delivery plan and dedicated funding is not enough. Wales' national tobacco control strategy expired in 2024 and has not been replaced. The Tobacco Control Strategy Board has not been reconvened. Without these foundations, the smoke-free 2030 goal will not be met.

ASH Wales calls on a Wales Green Party government to:

- urgently reconvene the Tobacco Control Strategy Board and agree a new fully-funded national implementation plan
- direct Tobacco and Vapes Bill consequential funding in full to cessation service delivery
- embed a specific, resourced tobacco control component within the National Cancer Strategy
- integrate cessation support into the lung screening programme from day one
- sustain funding for financial incentives to help pregnant women quit

Ambitions on prevention must include action on smoking, a key driver of poor health outcomes.

The opportunity is there. What is needed now is delivery.

Across the 2026 Senedd manifestos, parties have recognised many of the same challenges: NHS pressure, cancer outcomes, preventable illness, poverty and health inequalities.

These issues cannot be separated from smoking.

Tobacco remains one of the clearest and most preventable drivers of poor health in Wales. It places pressure on public services, deepens inequality, and cuts lives short. The next Welsh Government does not need to start from scratch. Wales has the evidence, the public support, and a clear Roadmap to build from.

ASH Wales stands ready to work with all parties to turn manifesto commitments into meaningful action: a renewed national tobacco control strategy, properly funded cessation services, stronger action on illegal tobacco and vapes, and partnership with the communities most affected.

This analysis is intended to support evidence-based policymaking and does not support or oppose any political party.

