

SCALA FRAMEWORK

Asking and
advising about
alcohol in primary
health care at
municipal level



SCALE-UP OF PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT
OF ALCOHOL USE DISORDERS AND
COMORBID DEPRESSION IN LATIN AMERICA

Overview

- ❑ **Asking and advising about alcohol is an evidence-based public health and clinical program** that measures an adult's alcohol consumption during a consultation in a primary health care centre or other similar service and offers advice to those with an increased level of alcohol consumption to cut down; referral is offered to those with the most severe pattern of alcohol use or alcohol-related organ damage.
- ❑ **The program can take different forms.** The preferred option at municipal level is to implement a face-to-face program within a primary health care centre. However where the opportunity for face-to-face programs is limited, an alternative is to offer tele-medicine or digital approaches.
- ❑ **Costs will vary by size and scope of the program.** Evidence from **SCALA** suggests that it is likely to be between **Int\$30K and Int\$60K** for between 10K and 20K individuals whose alcohol consumption is measured and advice given through face-to-face consultations in a primary health care centre.
- ❑ **Returns on investments can be large.** Evidence from **SCALA** suggests that just considering savings as a result of reduced hospital admissions (a fraction of the total societal costs due to alcohol consumption), for every **Int\$1K** spent on the programme, **Int\$1.8K** could be saved.
- ❑ **THE SCALA FRAMEWORK provides a step-by-step approach** to consider the best approach to implement the ask and advise about alcohol program through primary health care at municipal level.
- ❑ **Further reference material can be found in the Appendix.**

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Purpose of the **SCALA FRAMEWORK**

Purpose

The **SCALA Framework** is intended to help primary health care centres and municipalities develop and implement effective asking and advising about alcohol programs by providing simple practical guidance learned from **SCALA** and other international research projects.

It will help to:

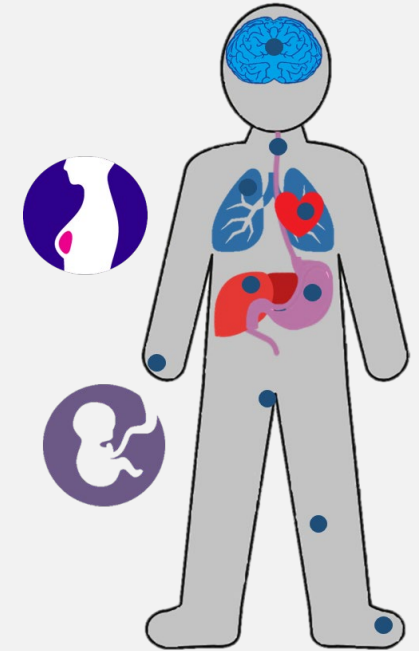
1. Identify the best program for a primary health care centre or municipality;
 2. Create, tailor, & implement an effective primary health care-based program to ask and advise adults who are drinking too much alcohol;
 3. Monitor and collect data to determine the effectiveness of the program and to refine it as needed.
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Who is the framework for?

Program directors and managers working in primary health care centres and municipal health departments; professional groups supporting primary health care providers; and, primary health care providers themselves who are active in their communities to help decrease heavy drinking and the harm done by alcohol.

The harm done by alcohol

Alcohol is a carcinogen (causes cancer) and there is no level of consumption that is risk-free. Forty-year-old men and women who regularly drink five drinks a day (50 grams of alcohol) lose between 4 and 5 years of life compared with those who drink less than one and a half drinks a day (15 grams of alcohol).



Some key consequences are...

- 1 **For those under 70 years of age, alcohol results in 2 million deaths** worldwide each year, representing 7% of all deaths in this age group;
- 2 **Worldwide, the three most common causes of alcohol-related death are:** liver disease; accidents; and tuberculosis;
- 3 **Alcohol is a causal factor in at least 200 different diseases and injuries;**
- 4 **Alcohol is a common cause** of high blood pressure and depression (see Appendix for comorbid depression);
- 5 **Alcohol results in social and economic loss** to local communities and municipalities.

Effectiveness of asking and advising

Average reduction in
drinking amounts

>12%

through asking and
advising about alcohol
programs in primary
health care

Some **key elements** are...

- 1 **The most important element is a conversation** about alcohol between a health care provider and their patient;
- 2 **The profession of the provider seem to make little difference** - nurses and doctors seem just as effective;
- 3 **The primary health care setting seems to make little difference** - whether in the centre itself or through an outreach service;
- 4 **The length of the advice seems to make little difference** - even just asking about alcohol can help;
- 5 **The mode of advice seems to make little difference** - simple advice can work as well as more in-depth motivational interviewing.

Asking and advising more patients

Providing training leads to more patients being asked and advised



In SCALA, primary health care centres with training asked 12 times the number of patients about their alcohol consumption, as centres with no training

Key elements of training that lead to more patients being asked and advised:

- 1 **Training should be brief** (2 to 4 hours) to fit in with busy schedules of providers;
- 2 **Training should be skills-based**, helping providers to build their capacity to ask and advise;
- 3 **Training should focus on patient centred conversations** with providers;
- 4 **Training can use videos to illustrate skills** - see: <https://www.scalaproject.eu/index.php/project-outputs>;
- 5 **Training should use role-play** to practice the skills and conversational techniques.

Asking and advising more patients

Providing community support leads to more patients being asked and advised



In SCALA, primary health care providers who received community support asked **28% more patients about their alcohol consumption, as providers with no community support**

Key elements of support that lead to more patients being asked and advised:

- 1 **Appoint a project champion** to advocate for the program;
- 2 **Involve providers and patients** in tailoring and adapting the clinical package and training course;
- 3 **Provide performance review feedback;**
- 4 **Exchange ideas between providers** to improve the program;
- 5 **Build in sustainability plans** from the outset;
- 6 **Mount communication campaigns** to normalize the program amongst providers and patients.

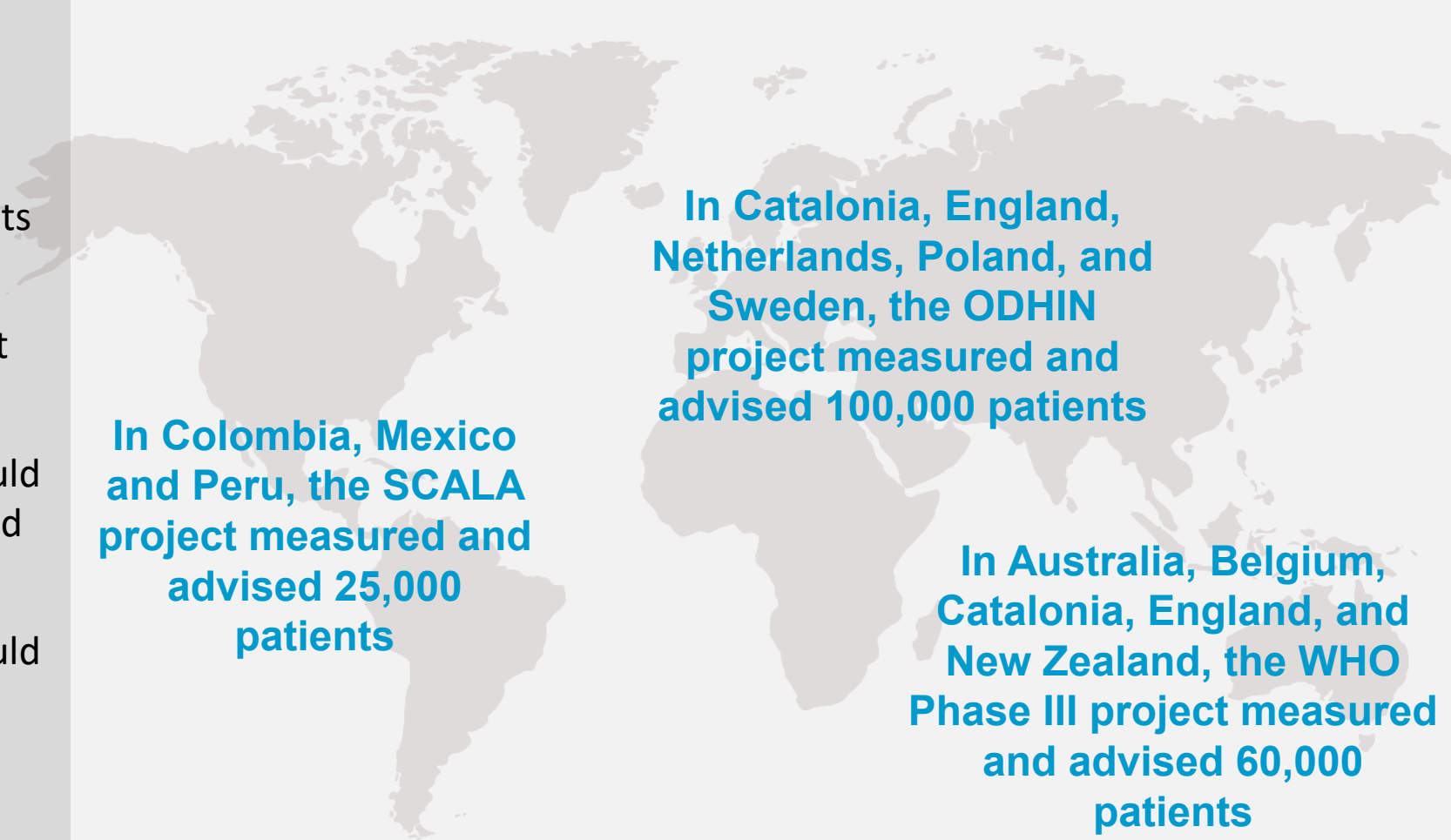
Experiences of three international research projects

Program overview

Asking and Advising is an evidence-based action during primary health care consultations which help patients drink less alcohol.

- Asking and advising should be kept brief and simple.
- Primary health care providers should be trained in the skills of asking and advising.
- Primary health care providers should be supported with local municipal action.

Estimated cost: \$30K-\$60K to cover 10K to 20K individuals, depending on delivery method, staff costs, and scope.



In Colombia, Mexico and Peru, the SCALA project measured and advised 25,000 patients

In Catalonia, England, Netherlands, Poland, and Sweden, the ODHIN project measured and advised 100,000 patients

In Australia, Belgium, Catalonia, England, and New Zealand, the WHO Phase III project measured and advised 60,000 patients

The SCALA framework is a compilation of best practices derived from international experiences

Systems approach to asking and advising about alcohol in primary health care

<i>Primary health care centre actions</i> Core action to ask and advise	<i>Enabling Actions</i> Ensures asking and advising is a community-based programme	
Asking and advising	Partnership Development	Community Engagement
In-person asking & advising	Government relations	Community engagement
Ask and advise patients in-person during consultations at primary healthcare centres.	Build and maintain relationships with municipalities which can lead to program sustainability.	Raise awareness of asking and advising about alcohol among community members and build allies, making every contact count between a service and a person.
Tele asking and advising	Advocacy work	Social norms campaign
Use telephone consultations by a range of health care providers to ask and advise, and make referral, as needed.	Work with municipalities to advocate for effective local regulations on price, availability and advertising.	Use print, video and radio advertisements to promote behaviour change, and normalize the practice of asking and advising about alcohol in primary health care among citizens and health care providers.
Digital asking and advising		
Use websites, apps, or chatbots that ask and advise via the primary health care centre or remotely.		

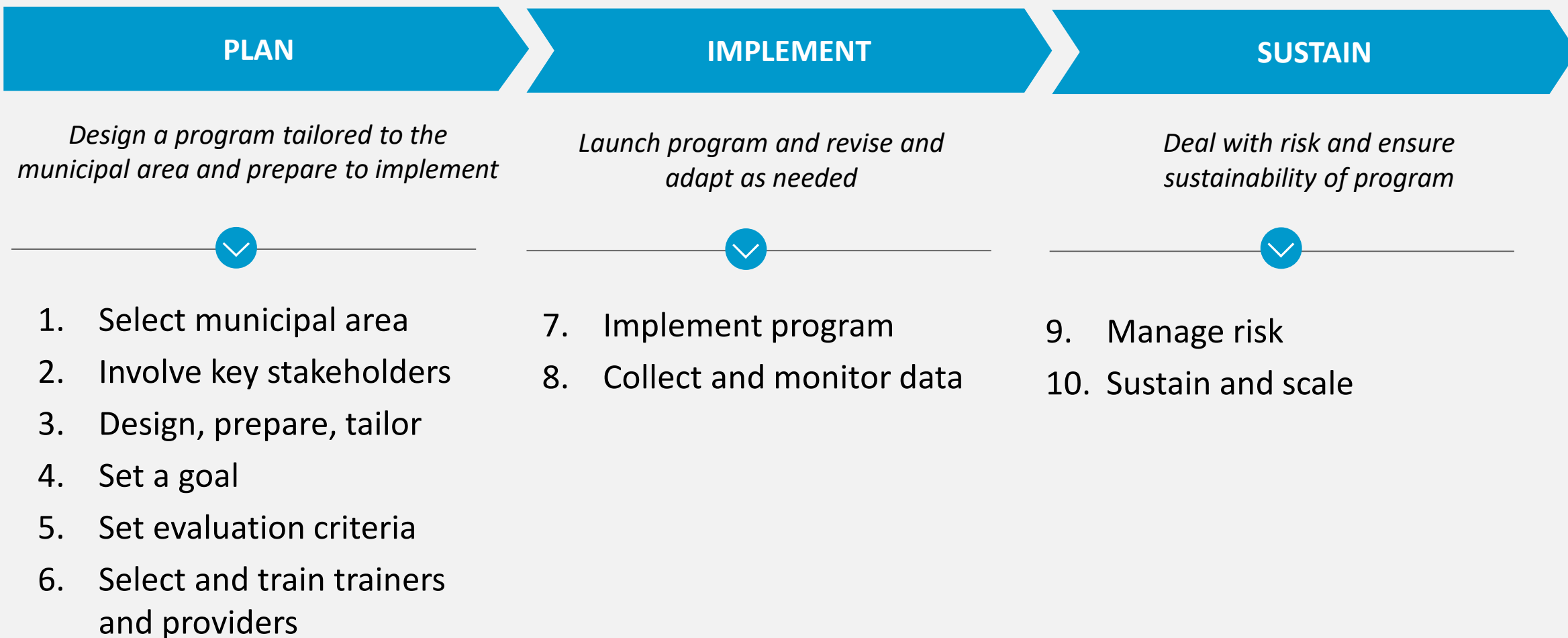
Health system cost components for primary health care-based program based on SCALA project in Latin America

	% distribution of total cost
Set-up costs (engaging primary health care centers and providers)	5%
Tailoring costs (tailoring and adapting questionnaires and training material, websites etc.)	5%
Training costs (training primary health care providers)	10%
Personnel (implementation by primary health care providers)	75%
Support (community and primary health care center support)	5%

Cost varies by size and scope of program but is estimated to be **INT\$30K-\$60K** for **10K-20K individuals** asked and advised about their alcohol consumption

Return on investment varies by size and scope of program but is estimated to be **INT\$1.8K** for every **INT\$1.0K** invested

TEN steps to implement an ask & advise program in a municipal area



Implementation timeline requires three years of initial input



Timeline for new municipal areas:

Invest sufficient time during first year to plan and prepare for the program, adapted and tailored to the local context, so as to maximize the likelihood of long-term success.

Shorter timeline for adjacent municipal areas:

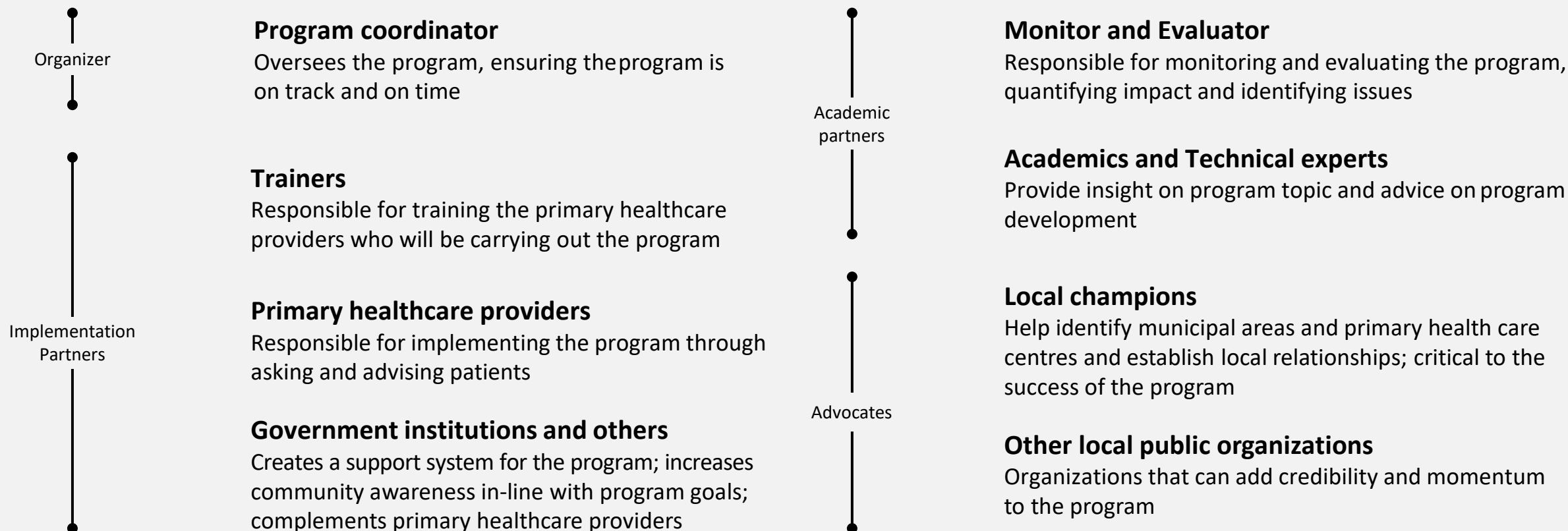
Timeline can be shortened if expanding into municipal areas that neighbour existing successful programs.

Step 1 | Identify municipal area using six dimensions

		<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Criteria</i>
Environment	1	Community need	Extent of alcohol problems in the municipal area How prevalent is alcohol use and alcohol-related harm in the municipal area? Any recent policy changes?
	2	Community interest	Level of interest in reducing the harm done by alcohol Has the municipal area identified reduction of the harm done by alcohol as a priority to address?
Implementation	3	Local partners & support	Support from and capacity of local organizations Building on existing connections with organizations, are there local organizations (e.g., non-governmental organizations) and government agencies who can assist with implementation,?
	4	Sustainability	Ability of municipal area to sustain program long-term on its own How likely is it that the municipal area can sustain and expand the program in the long-term?
Outcome	5	Anticipated impact	Degree of anticipated impact on the community How many people can be covered? How much reduction in heavy drinking will this lead to?
	6	Social norm change	Changing the social norm on heavy drinking Is there a lack of media coverage of the harm done by alcohol in the municipal area? How can implementing the program lead to local conversations and changing social norms on the topic?

At a minimum,
municipal area and
healthcare centre
buy-in essential

Step 2 | Bring together key stakeholders for a successful program



Step 3 | Adapt and tailor six technical materials

Materials	Descriptions
1. Clinical package	AUDIT-C measurement instrument, care pathway instructions for providers (see Appendix)
2. Information materials	Information and advice materials, including leaflets and booklets, for providers and patients regarding measurement and advice
3. Training course & user manual	Training course and instructions, training videos
4. Community support and campaigns	Materials for local communities and primary health care centres
5. Monitoring framework	System to document program aims, activities, outcomes, and process measures (see Appendix for RE-AIM framework)
6. Data collection	Results of the measurements, and achievement of coverage

Adapt and tailor the guideline content based on (see Appendix):

- Local and national guidelines and plans
- Individual healthcare provider factors
- Patient factors
- Involvement of local patient and provider groups
- Interactions between different professional groups
- Incentives and resources available
- Capacity for organizational change
- Social, political and legal factors

Step 4 | Set goals

Set both **quantitative** and **qualitative** goals


Goals should take into consideration:

- Available resources and capacity;
- Mode of implementation;
- Likely municipal reception to asking and advising program.

Five-year goal

Aim to make alcohol measurements as widespread as similar measurement programs such as for blood pressure.

The goal should be at least **25% of of the adult population that has had their alcohol consumption measured within the first five years of the program, which could lead to a 6% reduction of alcohol consumption in the community; a goal of 50% measurement would lead to a 11% reduction of alcohol consumption in the community.**



25%
coverage



Step 5 | Define evaluation criteria

Quantitative measures

Ongoing quantitative measures include:

- **Coverage:** Proportion of the population in the target community that has had their alcohol consumption measured.
- **Advice ratio:** Proportion of those who were identified as drinking at heavier levels who received advice or another form of support.

Qualitative measures

Ongoing qualitative feedback can be gathered using surveys or verbally during check-in meetings with providers and centers.

Qualitative evaluation to be provided by four groups:

- Relevant community stakeholders involved (e.g., government, academics, professional organizations);
- Primary healthcare managers;
- Primary healthcare staff;
- Patients and users.

Qualitative evaluation to cover:

- Stakeholder satisfaction;
- Interaction and engagement with the program;
- Barriers and facilitators to implementation.

Step 6 | Select and train both trainers and providers

Trainers

Providers

Selection

Considerations:

- Experience with training related to alcohol and primary health care
- Knowledge of the municipal area's culture and customs

Considerations:

- In-person: support from Director or Manager of healthcare centre is required, ensuring that time is available to attend training during working hours

Training

- 1 day training
- Cover common questions and concerns raised by primary healthcare providers
- Experience the training program (for providers) itself
- Consider trainings across municipal areas

- Initial training: 2-4 hours, depending on providers' existing familiarity with topic
- Follow-up training: 1-2 booster trainings
- Motivate providers to want to offer program
- Take into account high provider turnover and provider schedules by offering several training times
- Limit content to only the essentials; offer role play

Best practice

- ✓ Training should be **experiential**
- ✓ Courses should not exceed **24 attendees**
- ✓ Develop **internet skills-based training** simultaneously when designing the face-to-face training

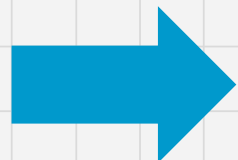
Step 7 | Implement, based on roles and qualifications

	Centre Manager or local administrator	Primary health care providers	Telehealth professionals	Specialists	Measuring & Reporting
Role description	Oversees the operations and management of program at primary health care centre	Implement asking and advising during patient consultations	Implement asking and advising over the phone	Provide clinical support to severe cases; provide basic training on managing difficult cases	Designs and oversees data collection, maintains systems, and analyses of outcomes
Qualifications	Project management experience; technical knowledge	Trained in asking and advising about alcohol; experience of local health systems; basic knowledge of digital tools		Clinically trained to manage severe alcohol cases; track record of training healthcare providers	Experience designing and monitoring data collection; programming and analytical skills

Step 8 | Collect and monitor data

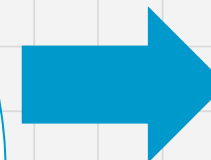
COLLECT

- ✓ Patient characteristics (age, sex, delivery method)
- ✓ Patient's AUDIT-C score
- ✓ Information on advice and support provided
- ✓ Stakeholder and provider feedback on program



CALCULATE

- ❖ Coverage, numbers and percent
- ❖ Advice given to at-risk drinkers, numbers and percent
- ❖ Change in number of alcohol measurements over time
- ❖ Cost per measurement administered
- ❖ Stakeholder satisfaction



OUTCOMES

- Information on number of heavy drinking patients identified
- Provider performance / productivity report (monthly)
- Summary of measurements administered (monthly)
- Program impact to date

Step 9 | Manage and address possible risks

Possible risks

Description & Example

Possible solutions



Regulatory & Political

Regulatory changes can impact a community's consumption of alcohol, impacting scope or effectiveness of the program

Example: The price of alcohol is reduced

Political leadership changes can lead to changes in health directors and managers in some municipalities requiring renegotiation of programs

Leverage partners and stakeholders as soon as possible to create a coalition for change and approach governmental bodies

Report program achievements regularly to reduce risk pre-emptively
Establish written agreements with civil society organizations
Establish official agreements for the implementation of the program so that it is carried out independently of changes in leaders




Natural disasters (including COVID)

Natural disasters may either shift health system focus away from preventative services, delay or stop initiatives, while increasing the harm done by alcohol

Example: In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in pauses and diminished activities of SCALA program in Colombia, Mexico and Peru

Implement internet-based training and digital/tele-medicine approach
Adapt training and implementation program to infrastructure and resources available
For COVID, remind healthcare providers that alcohol is a risk factor for respiratory tract infection



High turnover of primary care staff

Use of short-term contract staff and burnout means inconsistent number of providers measuring alcohol consumption of patients, and potential difficulty with continuity and institutionalizing program
The mobility of personnel, variability of types of contracts and working conditions and workload

Adapt training and implementation program to provider needs and culture
Schedule regular, recurring trainings to ensure new staff are trained; existing providers can train other colleagues
Consider offering online trainings
Consider involving the unions in discussing solutions

Step 10 | Sustainability and Scaling Plan

Obtain explicit commitment from authorities like:

- ✓ Country, regional or local Department of Health
- ✓ Community Health Systems
- ✓ Directors of the Primary Healthcare Centers

to continue and adopt the program, integrating the program as part of the health system norm

From the outset, develop a transition plan together including mandating the program, guidelines and actions, and ensuring that training is included in professional curricula

Fully **integrate the measuring instruments** and data recording into existing electronic medical systems and records

Conclusion

1. **Face-to-face contact** between a provider and a patient in a primary health care centre is the core of an asking and advising program, that can be supplemented with tele-medicine and digital approaches.
2. **Stakeholders** at local, regional and national levels should be involved at all stages of the program from design to implementation to scale-up.
3. **From the outset**, plans for sustainability should be built in to all aspects of the program.
4. **Increasing coverage** is the goal - with the aim that 25% or more of the adult population within the catchment area of the centre has had their alcohol consumption measured by the fifth year of the program.
5. **Tracking progress** in coverage, and adapting delivery as needed is vital for the long-term success and sustainability of the program.

Appendix

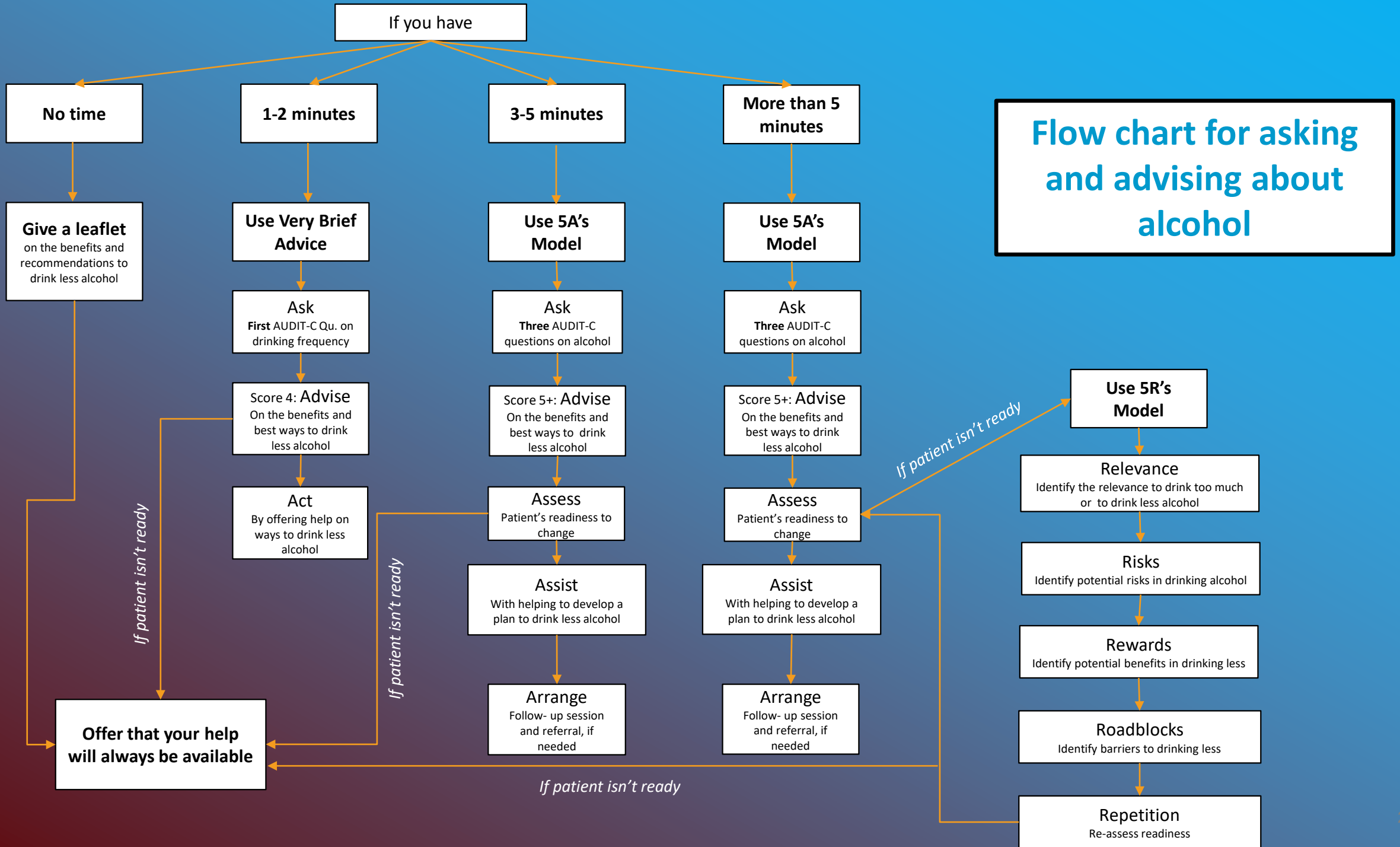
Measurement questionnaire | AUDIT-C Form

AUDIT-C Questionnaire

Patient Name _____ Date of Measurement _____

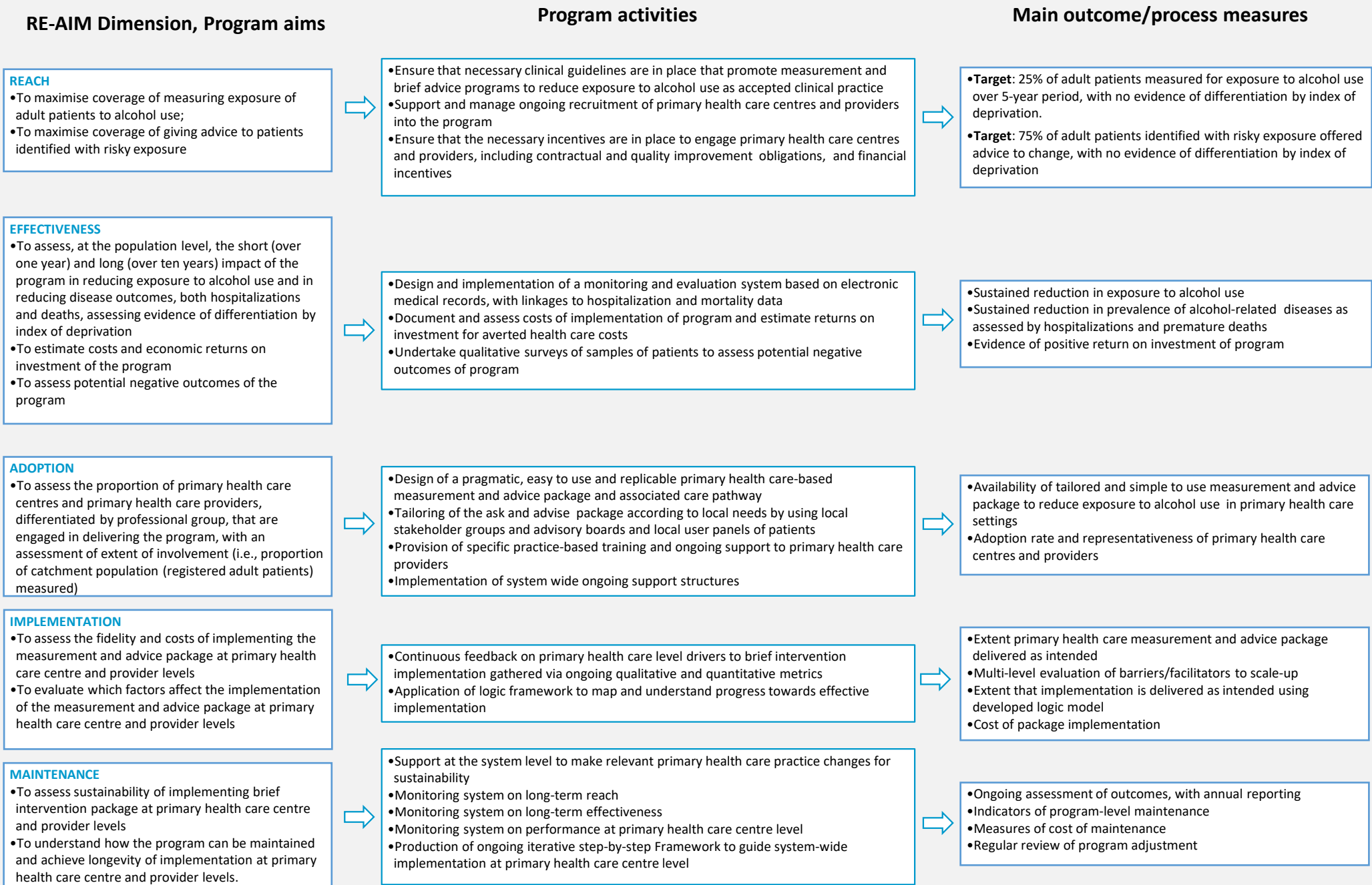
Please circle your response to each question below:

Questions	Scoring system				
	0	1	2	3	4
How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?	Never	Monthly or less	2-4 times per month	2-3 times per week	4+ times per week
How many units of alcohol do you drink on a typical day when you are drinking?	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-9	10+
How often have you had 6 or more units if female, or 8 or more if male, on a single occasion in the last year?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily
Total score					



Checklist to aid with program tailoring

Domain	Determinant of practice	Factor influencing program implementation	Is this factor relevant for the local setting?	How can the program be tailored to mitigate the factor?
Guideline factors	Clarity	Guidelines for alcohol measurement and giving advice for heavy drinking are not clear enough		
	Effort	Alcohol measurement and giving advice for heavy drinking is too much work to do		
	Feasibility	Alcohol measurement and giving advice for heavy drinking in our everyday practice is not feasible		
	Cultural appropriateness	Alcohol measurement and giving advice for heavy drinking is not appropriate in our culture		
Individual health professional factors	Skills needed to adhere	Providers do not have the skills to implement alcohol measurement and brief advice programmes for heavy drinking		
	Expected outcome	Providers think that alcohol measurement and giving advice for heavy drinking will not help their patients		
	Intention and motivation	Providers consider that alcohol measurement and giving advice for heavy drinking is not their responsibility		
	Self-efficacy	Providers believe they cannot help their heavy drinking patients		
	Emotions	Providers are reluctant to screen for heavy drinking due to social and cultural barriers		
	Capacity to plan change	Providers do not have enough time to screen and give advice for heavy drinking		
Patient factors	Patient beliefs and knowledge	Most heavy drinking patients think that their drinking is normal		
	Patient preferences	Patients do not like to discuss their alcohol consumption with their doctor or nurse		
Professional interactions	Referral processes	There are difficulties with access to referral services for patients with alcohol problems		
Incentives and resources	Availability of necessary resources	Instruments for alcohol measurement and giving advice to heavy drinkers do not exist		
	Financial incentives and disincentives	There is lack of financial incentives for providers to carry out alcohol measurement and advice		
	Nonfinancial incentives and disincentives	There is lack of non-financial incentives for providers to carry out alcohol measurement and advice		
	Assistance for clinicians	There is lack of on-going support for providers to carry out alcohol measurement and advice		
Capacity for organisational change	Capable leadership	There is lack of support by the leadership in PHC centres to support and implement programmes of alcohol measurement and advice		
	Assistance for organisational changes	There is lack of necessary organizational changes in PHC centres to implement alcohol measurement and advice		
Social, political and legal factors	Economic constraints on the health care budget	There is lack of sufficient staff in PHC centres to be able to implement programmes for alcohol measurement and advice		
	Legislation	Laws and regulations in the country that influence the price and availability of alcohol are too lenient, encouraging cultural tolerance to alcohol		



Re-AIM framework for monitoring program

Co-morbid depression

There is a strong **reciprocal relationship** between heavy drinking and depression:

- Heavy drinking increases the risk of developing depression;
- There is a high proportion of heavy drinkers amongst those with depression

In the **SCALA** project, as many as two fifths of patients with an AUDIT-C score of 8+ (very heavy drinking) had a PHQ-2 score of 3+ (indicative of depression)

Depression questionnaire | PHQ-2 ; score 3+ = depression

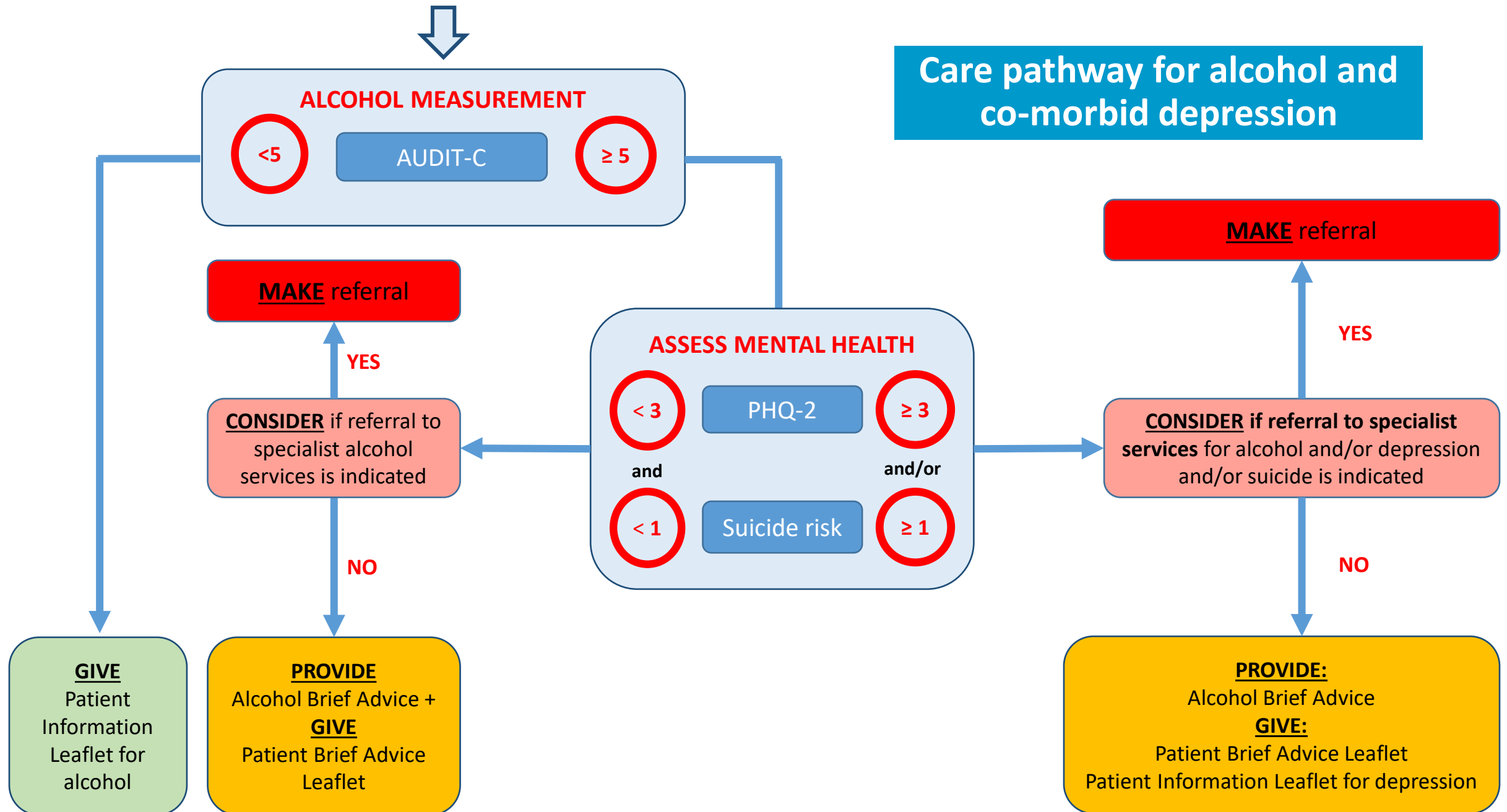
Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following two problems?					
	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day	
Little interest or pleasure in doing things	0	1	2	3	
Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless	0	1	2	3	
Sum score (possible range 0-6)				<u> </u> <u> </u>	

Suicide risk | PHQ-9 question; score 1+ = risk

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problem?					
	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day	
Thoughts that you would be better off dead, or of hurting yourself	0	1	2	3	

All adult patients visiting PHCU

Care pathway for alcohol and co-morbid depression



Additional Resources

Materials from the SCALA Project, implementing programs in Latin America, including:

- ✓ **Clinical guidelines and patient material**
- ✓ **Training courses, materials and videos**
- ✓ **Community support and communication material**
- ✓ **Survey and data collection instruments**
- ✓ **Project reports (deliverables) and scientific publications, with publications summarizing the evidence base**

Can be found: <https://www.scalaproject.eu/index.php/project-outputs>