

WRITTEN EVIDENCE TO THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT'S HEALTH AND SPORT COMMITTEE

Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Bill

Children in Scotland is pleased to submit Stage 1 evidence on the Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) Bill. We are glad that the Scottish Government has decided to reintroduce legislation aimed at addressing one of Scotland's core alcohol-related problems – excessive consumption -- and would encourage all MSPs to support enactment of the Bill.

Minimum Pricing

Scotland's children's sector is broadly supportive of minimum unit pricing for alcohol, but it is only part of the solution to Scotland's unhealthy relationship with alcohol. *Any minimum price set for alcohol must be set high enough to demonstrably and significantly discourage/reduce consumption.*

The price of alcohol should also be high enough that large quantities cannot be purchased for 'pocket money prices' – for children, young people and adults alike. Recent research by Alcohol Focus Scotland and Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems shows that alcohol is currently being sold for as little as 14p a unit in Scotland; and that "a young person receiving the average pocket money of £5.89 could buy 8 litres of cider containing 33 units of alcohol – enough alcohol to kill them".¹

As has been seen with recent restrictions on price promotions in Scotland, retailers have been able to circumvent rules by dispatching online alcohol purchases from depots in England. Although such sales only account for a small portion of alcohol sales, it seems possible that similar tactics would be used in the event of minimum pricing. Therefore, minimum pricing (with demonstrable impact, rather than merely symbolic) can only be a first step.

Beyond Minimum Pricing

- Provisions should be added to this Bill that ban or significantly restrict alcohol sponsorship of sporting events and cultural events – especially those primarily targeted at children and young people. There could be

¹ **The four steps to alcohol misuse** - Alcohol Focus Scotland; Scotland Health Action on Alcohol Problems; Balance, the North East Alcohol Office and engagement and empowerment specialists Our Life (2011)

legislation restricting alcohol marketing, particularly to under 18s through social marketing, such as Facebook. (as well as conventional means). This, however, is currently an issue reserved to the Westminster Parliament.

- Ensure that income from a public health levy on large retailers of alcohol is spent on effective preventative health measures and alcohol-related educational initiatives (e.g. peer education), which protect and improve public health in Scotland, or on campaigns targeted at reducing alcohol consumption and its negative impacts.
- Legislation, policies, programmes and resources are all needed to prevent and reduce the prevalence of fetal alcohol harm across Scotland.² This should be a top priority given the larger emphasis in the Scottish Parliament on preventative spending. This should also be supplemented by a robust effort to support and identify those living with this life-long condition.

Fetal alcohol harm, also known as fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) needs to become a core issue within Scotland alcohol and public health policies. These terms describe a range of birth defects that can result from prenatal exposure to alcohol causing permanent brain and nervous system damage affecting learning, behavior and life chances. Scotland cannot afford the human, social and financial costs of fetal alcohol harm.

- Preventing and solving other problems that 'drive people to drink' should play a prominent role in Scotland's alcohol agenda. For many, excessive consumption of alcohol or binge drinking is a means of self medicating and coping with events or experiences earlier in life. This may include their own parents' harmful relationship with alcohol. Reducing and preventing such damage in the first place should reduce dangerous alcohol consumption later in life. Investment in effective prevention and robust early intervention is a key part of tackling Scotland's unhealthy relationship with alcohol.

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² Early Years Briefing Paper 1: Fetal Alcohol Harm

http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/EYFbriefingsFetalAlcoholv6_000.pdf

