

Children in Scotland responds to the Scottish Government's discussion paper on alcohol, published today, 17 June 2008. (Comments by Paula Evans, policy and parliamentary information officer at Children in Scotland):

Raising the age limit:

“Raising the age at which alcohol can be bought in off-licences to 21 is helpful as part of a package of measures aimed at changing Scotland's drinking culture. However, regardless of the age at which alcohol can be purchased, effective enforcement of the existing law must be a priority.”

Extreme and harmful underage alcohol consumption:

“Of greater concern to Children in Scotland is the number of children presenting at accident and emergency departments with problems caused by alcohol misuse. The government's discussion paper states that: ‘...a recent audit of Scottish Emergency Departments over a five week period found nearly 650 children were treated for alcohol related problems, including 15 under 12 years old and one as young as eight.’ Extrapolated over 12 months, this would amount to around 6,760 children in Scotland having to go to A&E for alcohol-related problems in a year.”

“This is a shocking statistic that requires an effective response from national and local governments, as well as the NHS.”

“Questions need to be asked – and answered – about what happens to these children after their immediate problems are resolved at A&Es. Are they and their families given support to address this illegal, inappropriate and dangerous behaviour, or are they simply discharged like any other patient? Are records of multiple admissions kept and dealt with as an aspect of child protection – or are service providers adding to the problem by turning a blind eye?”

Drinking during pregnancy and when trying to conceive:

“Children in Scotland also welcomes support for the mandatory labelling of drinks to warn against drinking alcohol while pregnant. However, the government needs to be more robust about the hidden problem of foetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) in Scotland. The proposals made in the government's discussion paper do not go far enough in preventing the permanent brain and nervous system damage caused by FASD. Therefore these proposals will not yield immediate benefits for Scotland's children.”

“The government should look at this issue in all its complexity and learn from the examples of our international neighbours in Canada and France. What is clear is that the public are either unaware or unconvinced by current advice to not drink alcohol during pregnancy or when trying to conceive. The government

needs to take responsibility for a shift in attitudes to alcohol if we are truly to improve the health and life chances of Scotland's children in the short as well as the long term."

Parental alcohol use:

"The hidden problem of parental alcohol misuse must be confronted. We need to focus on offering parents support and education on the risks of alcohol misuse – and parents need to be properly informed about the part they play in shaping children's attitudes to alcohol. We need to do everything possible to challenge the way alcohol has been normalised in Scottish culture."

View the Scottish Government's discussion paper, published today, at:
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/227785/0061677.pdf>