

Alcohol: Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP): Continuation and Future Pricing: Scottish Government Consultation

Response submitted by the Royal College of Paediatrics
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About us

The [Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health \(RCPCH\)](#) is responsible for training and examining paediatricians. The College has over 19,500 members in the UK and internationally and sets standards for professional and postgraduate education. We work to transform child health through knowledge, research and expertise, to improve the health and wellbeing of infants, children and young people across the world.

RCPCH Scotland is supportive of policies that will work to eradicate alcohol-related harms that affect children and young people in Scotland. Taking into account that our areas of expertise are those of child health and representing the needs of the paediatricians who constitute our membership, this response will focus on the ways in which alcohol is harmful to children and young people's health and on how the approaches outlined in the consultation may improve their wellbeing.

In all policies that affect children and young people it is important to consider how their rights are supported. As such, we would highlight the following articles from the UNCRC and ask that these rights be considered:

- **Article 3** (best interests of the child): The best interests of the child must be a priority in all decisions and actions that affect children.
- **Article 6** (life, survival and development): Every child has the right to life. Governments must do all they can to ensure that children survive and develop to their full potential.

- **Article 24** (health and health services): Every child has the right to the best possible health. Governments must provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food, and a clean environment and education on health and well-being so that children can stay healthy.

It is widely reported that heavy drinking in adolescence can have adverse effects on young people's immediate physical and mental health, as well as lead to alcohol-related health problems in the future. Our members highlight the adverse effects of drinking on young people's mental health and the increased risk of self-harm and sexual exploitation. Evidence from our [State of Child Health Report](#) indicates that young people between the ages of 15 and 17 years are more likely to binge drink which is linked with other health risk behaviours such as unprotected or regretted sexual activity, antisocial and criminal behaviour and self-harm and thoughts of suicide. In the longer term, [evidence from Alcohol Focus Scotland](#) indicates that alcohol use during adolescence can lead to a wide range of cancer risks, disruptions in normal brain development and increased offending behaviour.

Furthermore, the effect of parental drinking can also not be ignored. In cases where a child lives with a parent who exhibits problematic drinking behaviours, this can impact on the level of care that the child receives and can lead to an increased risk of mental health problems and exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences. According to the [Scottish Health Survey 2019](#), among all children in 2017/2019 combined, 17% were living with at least one parent who exhibited hazardous, harmful drinking behaviour or had a possible alcohol dependence. Moreover, maternal drinking during pregnancy can have adverse effects on the unborn foetus, such as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders. According to [FAAST](#), an estimated 1 in 7 babies born is at risk of FASD, a condition which can lead to lifelong learning difficulties and increased mental health problems.

RCPCH Scotland welcomed the initial introduction of Minimum Unit Pricing in Scotland in 2018, as we believed that increasing the price of alcohol would reduce harm to children and young people in Scotland. Due to the harms that we have outlined above that are associated with alcohol consumption both by young people and by their parents and guardians, it is clear that any policies which seek to reduce the unhealthy consumption of alcohol in our population in Scotland are beneficial. While MUP must be part of a wider package of measures to reduce alcohol consumption and harm, it remains an essential cornerstone of Scotland's alcohol strategy. In their [Global strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol](#), the World Health Organisation indicated that pricing policies are particularly effective for young people, and can be used to reduce underage drinking, to halt progression towards drinking large volumes of alcohol and/or episodes of heavy drinking, and to influence consumers' preferences.

Public Health Scotland's evaluation of MUP shows that MUP does have a positive impact on health. Their evidence states that MUP was estimated to reduce deaths directly caused by alcohol consumption by 13.4% and hospital admissions by 4.1%. [Alcohol Focus Scotland and SHAAP](#) have indicated that MUP has had a positive impact on people in lower income groups, which is of particular importance given the well-known links between poverty and health inequalities and its devastating impact on children, young people, and their families.

The [PHS Evaluating the impact of minimum unit pricing for alcohol in Scotland report](#) does indicate that “practitioners working with families affected by alcohol expressed concerns about the ability of those with probable alcohol dependence to absorb the price increase without affecting the family budget, but recognised MUP was just one of many factors at play in the complex lives of these families.” The potential impacts of MUP on household budgets are of concern particularly in light of the cost-of-living crisis, which is affecting children and young people in Scotland, however this speaks more generally towards the need to support families living in poverty. We have repeatedly called on the Scottish Government to action all measures contained in the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act and ensure these actions are appropriately resourced and funded, enabling the interim (2023/24) and 2030/31 targets to be met on time.

RCPCH Scotland are in full support of Minimum Unit Pricing continuing going forward, as removing the policy would reverse the positive impacts the policy has already had.



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