
Draft Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) Bill: RCPCH Wales response December 2015

About RCPCH Wales

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health is responsible for training and examining paediatricians in the UK. The College has over 16,000 members in the UK and internationally (around 650 in Wales), and sets standards for professional and postgraduate medical education. RCPCH also works to:

- Engage with the media, government, policymakers, NHS, charities and other stakeholders.
- Improve child health through research, standards, quality improvement and policy.
- Provide educational programmes for paediatricians and child health professionals.
- Improve global child health.

Overall support for MUP

RCPCH Wales supports a minimum unit price for alcohol, based on strength, as one of a set of targeted and proportionate ways to reduce consumption by harmful drinkers. This approach has the largest effects on the cheapest and strongest drinks, therefore hitting the young and heavy drinkers hardest. Because children who are exposed to alcohol are encouraged to drink at an earlier age this leads to heavier drinking as an adult. It is important to protect children and young people from easily accessible alcohol.

Evidence of the problem and on MUP

An international study has shown that a minimum unit price works. The introduction of minimum unit pricing reduced overall alcohol consumption, particularly of high versus low alcohol content varieties of each beverage type, while the value of the alcohol sold increased, and there was a greater effect on off-licence than on-licence sales.¹

Public Health Wales' Child Death Review programme has linked action on reducing alcohol to reducing harm and deaths in children and young people:

- By identifying drugs and alcohol as one of a number of 'proximal factors' in apparent suicides and self-harm.²
- Finding alcohol consumption by young drivers to be 'a modifiable factor' in reducing deaths of teenagers in motor vehicles.³

¹ Stockwell T., Zhao J., Giesbrecht N. et al. (2012) "The raising of minimum alcohol prices in Saskatchewan, Canada: impacts on consumption and implications for public health", *American Journal of Public Health*: 2012, 102(12) pp. e103–e110 http://findings.org.uk/docs/Stockwell_T_14_findings.pdf

² Public Health Wales, Thematic review of deaths of children and young people through probable suicide, 2006-2012 (2014)

³ Public Health Wales, Thematic review of deaths of teenagers aged 13 to 17 years in motor vehicles between 2006-2010 (2013)

Socio-economic considerations

There have been concerns that fiscal-type health interventions are regressive, i.e. they hit the poorest in society the hardest. However, as a 2009 study said: “[t]here may also be concerns that the impact of minimum pricing would be regressive but the harms from alcohol also appear to affect lower social groups”.⁴

In 2014 researchers into alcohol use by 404 liver patients asked how much patients paid for alcohol.⁵ They found that patients with alcohol related cirrhosis were drinking on average the equivalent of four bottles of vodka each week and were buying the cheapest alcohol they could find. They were paying around 33p per unit, irrespective of their income. However, low risk moderate drinkers were paying on average £1.10 per unit. If the Welsh Government set a MUP at 50p, it would be unlikely to affect pubs or bars and would have no impact on moderate drinkers; the average cost would be £4 per year and 90% would not be affected at all. The impact on heavy drinking liver patients would be at least 200 times higher. MUP would affect the cheapest alcohol and the heaviest drinkers – so it is one of the fairest and most effective ways to tackle problem drinking.

Need for wider interventions

RCPCH Wales’ *Why Children Die* report (2014) called for Welsh Government to pursue mechanisms to restrict children and young people’s access to alcohol, including but not limited to minimum price per unit. RCPCH Wales also recommended regulation of marketing and availability and reducing underage sales.⁶

Dr Mair Parry

RCPCH Officer for Wales

Chair of the Paediatric & Child Health National Specialist Advisory Group

President of the Welsh Paediatric Society

⁴ Ludbrook, A (2009), ‘Minimum pricing of alcohol’, *Health Economics* 18(12): 1357-60

⁵ Sheron, Chilcott, Matthews et al (2014), Impact of minimum price per unit of alcohol on patients with liver disease in UK, *Clinical Medicine*, Vol 14, No 4: 1–7 <http://www.rcpch.ac.uk/system/files/protected/news/MUP.pdf>

⁶ RCPCH Wales, *Why Children Die*: <http://www.rcpch.ac.uk/improving-child-health/child-mortality/child-mortality>