

Minimum unit price for alcohol to be 'major part' of efforts to reduce alcohol-related harm – Vaughan Gething

Ahead of an Assembly debate on the Welsh Government's Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Bill, which was introduced to the National Assembly last October, the Health Secretary has announced extra investment in substance misuse services.

Assembly Members will decide later today whether the Bill should pass its first legislative stage, and proceed on to stage 2 – which involves detailed consideration by Assembly committees. If passed by the Assembly later this year, the current intention is that a minimum unit price would be introduced 12 months following the Bill's Royal Assent.

The Welsh Government invests almost £50m a year to support people with substance misuse issues. Almost half of this funding goes directly to the seven Area Planning Boards which commission substance misuse services for their region.

In response to calls made for additional resources to be allocated for substance misuse services, the Health Secretary has confirmed the ring-fenced substance misuse funding for health boards will be increased by nearly £1m, to over £18m from 2018-19.

Speaking ahead of the debate, Vaughan Gething said:

“Wales, like so many other western countries, has a problem with cheap, strong, readily-available alcohol.

“Minimum unit pricing is not a silver bullet, but it will be a major new and important tool in our approach to reducing alcohol consumption. By introducing a minimum price, we can make a difference – as we have done with the smoking ban, which demonstrated our determination to create a different future for the people of Wales.

“I've been very clear, that it will not work in isolation. Alcohol policy in Wales requires a variety of approaches, which taken together, can generate change. That's why we are supporting people throughout Wales to develop a healthier relationship with alcohol, through our Substance Misuse Strategy, and end the sad spectre of people dying from drink.

“We know there is a significant amount of evidence from around the world, showing there is a very clear relationship between the price of alcohol and alcohol consumption. Our ground-breaking legislation helps address that.

“There have long been calls for Wales to change its relationship with alcohol. I expect this Bill will make a fundamental contribution to reducing hazardous and harmful drinking and ultimately, will help to save lives.”