

Ministers press ahead with 50p minimum unit price for alcohol in Wales

Alcohol is a major cause of death and illness in Wales. It leads to a number of health and social harms, particularly for the significant minority of people who drink to excess.

In 2017, there were 540 alcohol-related deaths in Wales and in 2017-18, there were nearly 55,000 alcohol-related hospital admissions. All alcohol-related deaths and alcohol-related hospital admissions are preventable.

Ministers have long been clear that a pricing intervention must be a key component of the Welsh Government's comprehensive strategy to tackle alcohol misuse, not least because the affordability of alcohol has increased significantly over the past two decades.

The National Assembly supported minimum pricing when the Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Bill was passed last year.

The 2018 Act is targeted at protecting the health of hazardous and harmful drinkers who tend to consume greater amounts of low-cost and high-strength alcohol. It provides a formula for calculating the applicable minimum price for alcohol by multiplying the percentage strength of the alcohol, its volume and the minimum unit price. This allows the Welsh Government to target the sale and supply of low-cost and high-strength alcohol.

Ministers have consulted on a preferred minimum unit price of 50p. A summary of the responses to that consultation have been published today. Taking into account these consultation responses, Ministers remain of the view of that a 50p minimum unit price is a proportionate response to tackling the health risks of excessive alcohol consumption.

The Welsh Government intends to lay regulations to the National Assembly for Wales, specifying this level, for its consideration later this year.

Health Minister, Vaughan Gething said:

"The Welsh Government has always said that minimum pricing forms part of a wider strategy and approach to reducing substance misuse.

"Following a public consultation, I'm pleased to confirm we will now ask the National Assembly for Wales to approve a 50p minimum unit price. We believe a 50p minimum unit price strikes a reasonable balance between the anticipated public health and social benefits and intervention in the market.

"We will continue to use all available levers to reduce the harms caused by the excessive consumption of alcohol, as we develop and

take forward a new delivery plan for substance misuse.”

Many responses to the consultation supported the principle of minimum pricing, but also raised issues regarding the potential unintended consequences of introducing a minimum unit price for alcohol.

The Minister added:

“The consultation process raised a number of issues, such as the potential impacts on vulnerable groups, household budgets, the risk of switching to other substances and the potential increase in the number of people seeking support from services. We will continue to consider these potential impacts.

“We have commissioned specific research to look at the risk of switching, which will report ahead of implementation. In December 2018, we announced an extra £2.4m in funding for Area Planning Boards for local frontline substance misuse services so that we can ensure services are widely available. We have worked closely with Area Planning Boards throughout the development of this legislation and we will continue to do so ahead of implementation.”