

New law to introduce minimum price for alcohol in Wales

The Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Bill, has been introduced before the National Assembly for Wales today by the Public Health Minister, Rebecca Evans.

The Bill will address longstanding and specific health concerns around the effects of excess alcohol consumption, which is estimated to lead to 50,000 alcohol-related hospital admissions a year, costing the Welsh NHS £120m annually. In 2015, there were 463 alcohol-related deaths in Wales.

The new Bill supports the Welsh Government's comprehensive strategy to tackle harmful and hazardous drinking by tackling the availability and affordability of cheap, strong alcohol, which is part of wider efforts to improve and protect the health of the population of Wales.

The Bill proposes to introduce a minimum price for alcohol supplied in Wales, and to make it an offence for alcohol to be supplied below that price. The Bill proposes that the level of the minimum unit price (MUP) for this purpose would be specified in regulations made by the Welsh Ministers.

In 2014, research on the impacts of introducing a 50p minimum unit price (for example) estimated the following:

- a 50p MUP would result in 53 fewer deaths and 1,400 fewer hospital admissions in Wales per year
- a 50p MUP would save the Welsh NHS more than £130m over 20 years, by reducing impacts on health services, such as Accident and Emergency
- it would reduce workplace absence, which is estimated would fall by up to 10,000 days per year.

Over a 20 year period, the introduction of a MUP could contribute £882m to the Welsh economy in terms of the reduction in alcohol-related illness, crime and workplace absence.

The Bill proposes:

- a formula for calculating the applicable minimum price for alcohol using the percentage strength of the alcohol, its volume and the MUP
- powers for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation to specify the MUP
- to establish a local authority-led enforcement regime with powers of entry, powers to bring prosecutions for offences and to issue fixed penalty notices.

Public Health Minister Rebecca Evans said:

“Alcohol-related harm is a significant public health problem in

Wales. The 463 alcohol-attributable deaths in 2015 were all avoidable, and each of these deaths would have had a devastating effect on the person's family and friends. Alcohol-related harm also has a big impact on public services such as the NHS.

"There is a very clear and direct link between levels of excessive drinking and the availability of cheap alcohol. So we need to take decisive action now to address the affordability of alcohol, as part of wider efforts to tackle alcohol related harm.

"The Bill I am unveiling today will tackle excessive alcohol consumption by making it an offence for retailers to sell strong alcohol at low prices. It will make an important contribution to improving health outcomes, by putting prevention and early intervention at the heart of our efforts to reduce alcohol-related harm. This will undoubtedly help save lives."

Chief Medical Officer for Wales, Dr Frank Atherton said:

"As alcohol has become more affordable, consumption has increased. As consumption increases, harm increases. All alcohol-attributable deaths are avoidable deaths, demonstrating the urgency for further preventative action.

"Increasing the price of alcohol through the introduction of a minimum unit price provides us with an effective and efficient way of reducing excessive alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harm.

"It will have a small impact on moderate drinkers. The most substantial effects will be experienced by harmful and hazardous drinkers, who are more likely to consume cheaper and higher strength alcohol products."