

Welsh Government proposes 50p minimum unit price for alcohol

The Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Act 2018 was passed by the National Assembly for Wales in June 2018, and received Royal Assent in August 2018.

The Act allows Welsh Ministers to introduce a minimum unit price (MUP) for alcohol supplied in Wales, and makes it an offence for alcohol to be supplied by alcohol retailers below a minimum price made up of that MUP, the strength of the alcohol and its volume, specifically targeting cheap, strong alcohol.

The Health Secretary has today launched a consultation on the Welsh Government's preferred MUP of 50p.

It is currently intended that the new regime will come into force in summer 2019.

Recent analysis by the University of Sheffield estimated that a 50p MUP in Wales will:

- Capture nearly half of off-trade alcohol sold and just under half of alcohol purchased by harmful drinkers, whilst only capturing just over a fifth of alcohol purchased by moderate drinkers
- Lead to 66 (8.5%) fewer alcohol-attributable deaths per year
- Lead to 1,281 (3.6%) fewer alcohol-attributable hospital admissions per year.

Over half of the estimated reduction in consumption would be accounted for by harmful drinkers. There would be minimal impact on moderate drinkers, accounting for 8% of the reduction in consumption in line with the targeted aim of the legislation.

Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

“The ultimate objective of introducing a minimum unit price is to tackle alcohol-related harm, including alcohol-attributable hospital admissions and alcohol-related deaths in Wales, by reducing alcohol consumption in hazardous and harmful drinkers.

“In particular, the Act is targeted at protecting the health of hazardous and harmful drinkers – including young people – who tend to consume greater quantities of low-cost and high-alcohol content products.

“The higher the level of MUP that is chosen, the greater the proportion of purchased alcohol that is captured and the greater the estimated impact on alcohol-related harms. However, there is a trade-off, as there is also a greater impact on moderate drinkers,

particularly moderate drinkers in the more deprived groups. After careful consideration and on balance, my preference is that the initial level of the MUP should be set at 50p. But we will now gather views from individuals, businesses, public bodies and interested parties about the Welsh Government's preferred price of 50p."

The new law supports the Welsh Government's comprehensive strategy to tackle hazardous and harmful 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.

Currently:

- Just under two-fifths (37%) of all alcohol is currently purchased at less than 50p per unit, accounting for just under half of all off-trade alcohol (47% sold below 50p)
- Moderate drinkers purchased 22% of their units below this threshold, with the figures for hazardous and harmful drinkers being higher (36% and 46% respectively)
- Harmful drinkers purchase more of their alcohol in the off-trade than either hazardous or moderate drinkers (76% compared to 67% and 60% respectively).