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Minimum unit pricing in Scotland will make life better for thousands of people, says charity – and calls for Westminster to step up

The Supreme Court in Scotland today (15 November) delivered its judgement that minimum unit pricing (MUP) for alcohol is legal, a step which charity Alcohol Concern says will improve the health and wellbeing of thousands of people.

Harmful drinking is the biggest avoidable cause of death for people aged 15-49 in the UK. It also costs the NHS £3.5 billion a year.

The decision in Scotland comes after a long and protracted legal challenge led by the Scotch Whisky Association and follows the recent announcement by the Welsh Government on its plans to introduce minimum alcohol pricing in Wales.

Alcohol Concern, along with other public health groups, have long campaigned for the measure.

Alcohol Concern has recently merged with Alcohol Research UK.

Dr Richard Piper, CEO of the merged charity, said:

“The introduction of a minimum unit price is an important and effective step in addressing the harms caused by alcohol misuse in Scotland. Scotland and Wales will now be pursuing minimum pricing, leading the way for England to implement this important and targeted public health measure. Now is the time for Westminster to step up and save lives.

“As alcohol has become more affordable, the rates of alcohol-related ill-health have risen. The fact is, something has to be done.

“Crucially, this isn’t a tax on alcohol. Minimum pricing is a much more targeted measure than tax, because it raises the prices only of the very cheapest and strongest drinks on the market – those that tend to be consumed by the heaviest drinkers. On top of that, it won’t affect pubs.”

New research:

Last month Alcohol Concern released new research which found that alcohol is currently on sale for as little as 18p per unit, meaning that 14 units – the maximum amount the UK’s Chief Medical Officers recommend any of us drink in a week to have a low risk of health problems – is available for just £2.52. Some of the cheapest drinks on sale include:

- 3 litres of strong cider for £3.99: 18p per unit
- 70cl of fortified wine for £2.99: 27p per unit
- 70cl of vodka or gin for £10.00: 38p per unit

With the introduction of a minimum price per unit of 50p – the level most talked about so far – the prices of all these drinks, and many others like them, would increase substantially.

In contrast, Alcohol Concern's analysis of well-known alcohol brands available to purchase online from major supermarkets found that most of these would not be affected by the 50p threshold, except when on special offer or being sold with a multiple purchase discount.

Dr Richard Piper explained,

“If you're a moderate or light drinker then you really have nothing to worry about. We may end up seeing fewer alcohol price promotions like buy-one-get-one-free deals but it's unlikely we will see significant increases in the prices of the most popular drinks. This is about tackling the cheap, high-strength products most associated with harmful drinking.”

ENDS

Note to editors:

Alcohol Concern recently merged with Alcohol Research UK to create a major independent national charity, working to eliminate the harms caused by alcohol. For more information visit:

www.alcoholconcern.org.uk and www.alcoholresearchuk.org.

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