

## Health and Care Bill – Second Reading Briefing

Wednesday 14 July

**Please speak in the Second Reading debate of the Health and Care Bill about the need to include alcohol in the bill.**

### The Health and Care Bill

The Health and Care Bill is the biggest piece of health legislation in almost a decade, yet it does not go far enough to reduce harm from alcohol, one of the main risk factors for illness and early death in the UK. Hospital admissions and deaths from alcohol are currently at record levels,<sup>1</sup> and have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Around 80 people die every day in the UK due to alcohol.<sup>2</sup>

To stem the rising tide of alcohol harm, the bill should include evidence-based measures to reduce harm, including:

- Inclusion of alcohol within the definition of “less healthy food and drink” that will be subject to advertising restrictions.
- The introduction of minimum unit pricing (MUP) in England.
- A commitment to ensure access to high quality alcohol treatment and recovery services for those who need it, backed by appropriate funding.

### Alcohol should be part of advertising restrictions

As part of the Government’s obesity strategy, Clause 125 will introduce restrictions for advertising of less healthy food and drink: a 9pm TV watershed and a prohibition of paid-for advertising online.<sup>3</sup> The definition of “less healthy food or drink” does not include alcoholic beverages.

Alcoholic drinks can have high calorie and sugar content and those who drink get nearly 10% of their calorie consumption from alcohol.<sup>4</sup> A pint of beer has the same calories as a Mars Bar and a glass of wine the same calories as three Jaffa Cakes.<sup>5</sup> Under the bill, adverts for sugary soft drinks will be restricted but ads for alcoholic drinks will not, even though they can be considerably more calorific. For example, 100ml of a 40% spirit contains 244 kcal,<sup>6</sup> compared to just 42kcal for 100ml of Coke.<sup>7</sup>

As with unhealthy foods, children are exposed to significant alcohol marketing, leading them to drink more and earlier than they otherwise would.<sup>8</sup> Research shows that children see

<sup>1</sup> NHS Digital (2020) [Statistics on Alcohol, England 2020](#); Office for National Statistics (2021) [Quarterly alcohol-specific deaths in England and Wales: 2001 to 2019 registrations and Quarter 1 \(Jan to Mar\) to Quarter 4 \(Oct to Dec\) 2020 provisional registrations](#).

<sup>2</sup> Public Health England (accessed March 2020) [Local Alcohol Profiles for England](#); Scottish Public Health Authority (2018) [Hospital admissions, deaths and overall burden of disease attributable to alcohol consumption in Scotland](#); Public Health Wales Observatory (accessed July 2020). [Alcohol in Wales](#); Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2019) [Alcohol-specific deaths registered in Northern Ireland \(2018\)](#).

<sup>3</sup> Health and Care Bill [Explanatory Notes](#)

<sup>4</sup> Department of Health and Social Care (2020) [Tackling obesity: empowering adults and children to live healthier lives](#).

<sup>5</sup> NHS [Alcohol support, calories in alcohol](#).

<sup>6</sup> Eurocare (2018) [What’s in this drink?](#)

<sup>7</sup> Coca Cola GB (accessed December 2020) [How many calories are there in a 330ml can of Coca-Cola original taste?](#)

<sup>8</sup> PHE (2016) [The public health burden of alcohol and the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of alcohol control policies](#); The Institute of Alcohol Studies [Factsheet: marketing and alcohol](#).

more TV alcohol advertising than adults.<sup>9</sup> Research found that nine in ten primary school children recognised the beer brand Foster's, a higher recognition rate than for leading brands of crisps, biscuits and ice-cream.<sup>10</sup>

### **An opportunity for minimum unit pricing**

This bill provides an opportunity for the Government to introduce minimum unit pricing (MUP) in England, as happened in Scotland in 2018 and Wales in 2020. Alcohol is available too cheaply in England: supermarket beer is 188% more affordable than in 1987.<sup>11</sup> It is now possible to buy 2.5 litres of strong cider, containing the same amount of alcohol as 19 shots of vodka, for just £3.59.<sup>12</sup>

Evidence from Scotland shows MUP is effective: MUP has led to an 8% fall in alcohol sales in Scotland compared to Northern England.<sup>13</sup> It is estimated that a 50p MUP in England would save 525 lives and prevent over 22,000 hospital admissions annually.<sup>14</sup> It would have minimal impact on restaurants and pubs with less than 1% of products sold in the on-trade affected.<sup>15</sup> A pint of 4% ABV beer has to cost £1.14 to be affected by a 50p MUP – far below the price of most pints in pubs.

### **The bill should improve access to alcohol treatment**

The bill should include a commitment to full access to high quality alcohol treatment and recovery services for those who need it, backed by appropriate funding. Treatment is essential to support those with alcohol dependence towards recovery. Pre-pandemic, only one in five dependent drinkers were believed to be in treatment, leaving a shocking 80% lacking help.<sup>16</sup>

Low levels of access to alcohol treatment are largely due to insufficient funding. Since 2012, there have been real term funding cuts of over £100 million, an average of 30% per service in England.<sup>17</sup> This has a real-world impact: homelessness charity St Mungo's estimates that reductions in drug and alcohol treatment funding have led to 12,000 fewer current and at-risk rough sleepers accessing support in 2018/19 than if treatment funding had remained at the 2010 level.<sup>18</sup>

Alcohol treatment is cost effective. Every £1 invested in alcohol treatment yields £3 in return, rising to £26 over 10 years.<sup>19</sup> Recovery also yields powerful dividends for families affected by addiction.

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<sup>9</sup> Patil S et al. (2014) [Youth exposure to alcohol advertising on television in the UK, the Netherlands and Germany](#).

<sup>10</sup> Alcohol Focus Scotland (2017) [Promoting good health from childhood. Reducing the impact of alcohol marketing on children in Scotland](#).

<sup>11</sup> Institute of Alcohol Studies (2018) [Supermarket alcohol 188% more affordable than thirty years ago](#)

<sup>12</sup> Alcohol Health Alliance (2020) [Small change: alcohol at pocket money prices](#)

<sup>13</sup> Anderson, P. (2021) [Impact of minimum unit pricing on alcohol purchases in Scotland and Wales: controlled interrupted time series analyses](#)

<sup>14</sup> Angus, C. et al. (2016) [Alcohol and cancer trends: Intervention Studies](#). University of Sheffield and Cancer Research UK.

<sup>15</sup> Angus, C. et al. (2015) [Modelling the impact of minimum unit price and identification and brief advice policies using the Sheffield alcohol policy model version 3](#). University of Sheffield.

<sup>16</sup> Public Health England. [Public health dashboard](#).

<sup>17</sup> Drummond, C. (2017) [Cuts in addiction services are a false economy](#). BMJ.

<sup>18</sup> St Mungo's (2020) [Knocked back: Failing to support people sleeping rough with drug and alcohol problems is costing lives](#).

<sup>19</sup> Public Health England (2018) [Alcohol and drug prevention, treatment and recovery: why invest?](#).