



# Myth Busting on Minimum Pricing – The Facts

## What's the problem?

Alcohol consumption in the UK has more than doubled over the last 40 years and latest survey estimates reveal that 40% of men and 33% of women are drinking twice the daily limits. As consumption has increased, so has alcohol related harm. The consequences of alcohol misuse affect individuals, their friends and families, communities and wider society and costs more than £2 billion a year. The misuse of alcohol is affecting us all.

Excess alcohol consumption is not a marginal problem that affects a particular age or socio-economic group. Alcohol misuse is defined as drinking over and above daily recommended limits and the statistics demonstrate that it is increasingly commonplace for people to misuse alcohol on a regular basis.

In Western Europe, alcohol consumption is decreasing at a time when Scotland's consumption rates are increasing. We have one of the fastest growing mortality rates from chronic liver disease in the world and alcohol-related death rates are twice those of England and Wales. Alcohol is also driving health inequalities, with harm disproportionately experienced by those from the most deprived groups. In Scotland, alcohol is a factor in one death every three hours. This is an enormous death toll and the seriousness and scale of the problem requires serious action.

Scotland needs to act now to change this pattern of behaviour. A wide-ranging strategy is needed to address the reason why we drink in the first place, and to help people make choices to reduce their alcohol consumption. Central to this strategy is the price of alcohol.

## Why do we need minimum pricing?

There is a strong relationship between price and consumption: as price falls, consumption increases. Alcohol has become progressively more affordable, particularly for off-sales. Recent research into differing price policy options concluded that a minimum price is the most effective of a range of policy options (a minimum price is a set price for a unit of pure alcohol below which it cannot be sold).

## So what is minimum pricing?

Minimum pricing has been suggested as a way to increase the price of drinks which have high alcohol content but are usually very cheap. The idea behind minimum pricing is based on the number of 'units' contained within the drink – the more units it contains (the stronger it is) the more expensive it becomes.

Examples include supermarket own brand spirits and cheap 'white' ciders, usually sold in large plastic bottles. These drinks would be most affected because they are high in strength but sold very cheaply.

## But I don't want to pay more for my booze.

Most people won't pay much more. The drinks which will cost more are the cheapest ones which are popular with young people and heavy drinkers. If the minimum price is set at 45p for example, moderate drinkers can only expect to pay around 11p more per week.



### **So how do you work it out?**

At the moment, a two litre plastic bottle of cider (15 units) sells for around £3.08. Under a minimum pricing scheme of, say, 45p per unit, it couldn't be sold for less than £6.75. It's easy to work out: 15 units x 45p = £6.75.

Supermarket 'own brand' whisky and vodka sells for between £5 and £8 depending on which supermarket you buy it from. This would become £12.60 as a minimum price (28 units x 45p). Most people would agree that this is a reasonable price for a 75cl bottle of whisky or vodka.

### **But won't people on low incomes suffer even more?**

People on a low income are even more likely to die or have a long-term illness as a result of drinking too much. Those drinking within the sensible drinking guidelines will only see a small rise (of around 11p) in the amount they pay and many will barely notice the difference. People who find themselves paying much more for alcohol are likely to be drinking too much and are more likely to make choices about changing their drinking behaviour as a result.

### **Won't there be even more job losses during this really difficult time?**

There is no evidence to support this. The retailers might not sell as many drinks but the higher price for some drinks would mean that it would balance out. Many of the premium whiskies exported from Scotland, for example, will remain unaffected by the change in pricing.

### **There is no support for minimum pricing.**

The four national Chief Medical Officers in the UK along with EU Ministers and World Health Officials all recognise the importance of raising the price to reduce consumption. By introducing such a policy, Scotland will become an international leader in its efforts to protect the public health. The hospitality industry, children's charities, anti-poverty campaigners, licensed trade associations and even drinks producers such as Molson Coors have come out in favour of minimum pricing.

### **Isn't the Government just trying to raise money with a new name for another tax?**

Not at all, the Government won't receive a penny from the drinks which go up in price, this goes directly to the drinks producers and retailers.

### **Who will benefit from minimum pricing?**

We are encouraging everyone to drink less and improve health, but certainly if heavy drinkers are drinking less, friends and family will notice a positive difference in their lives. If young people are drinking less, they will be less at risk of coming to harm themselves and less likely to disrupt those living in the local area.

At the moment, alcohol problems cost everyone in Scotland £500 per year. Minimum pricing will benefit us all – it will save millions of pounds in NHS, crime and employment costs.

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