



Alcohol Focus Scotland response to the Chief Medical Officers' Alcohol Guidelines Review

Alcohol Focus Scotland welcomes and fully supports this updated advice from the UK Chief Medical Officers. The challenge now is to clearly communicate the guidance to improve public knowledge and understanding, and enable people to make a fully informed choice about the level of risk they are willing to accept.

Surveys show that less than half of the Scottish public are aware that alcohol is a risk factor for seven types of cancer, while only around half are able to state the number of units contained in a pint of beer, measure of spirits or glass of wine. Given this, Alcohol Focus Scotland agrees with the Expert Group's recommendation that there should be a high-profile mass media information campaign to raise awareness of units, the new guidelines and the rationale behind them. To ensure credibility and independence, this campaign must come from government and/or the NHS with no alcohol industry input (in line with the World Health Organisation's recommendations about the role of industry).

The media also plays an important role in disseminating accurate health information to the public so we would hope that relevant journalists are fully briefed on the latest evidence and guidance. It is also essential that all healthcare professionals are equipped to inform and influence the public about the health risks associated with alcohol, including through Scotland's Alcohol Brief Interventions programme.

Under current EU legislation, food products and soft drinks have to show detailed ingredients and nutritional values on their labels but alcohol is inexplicably exempt from this. **Labelling is essential to enable consumers to make practical use of the CMO guidelines. Every alcohol product label should have to describe, in a standard layout and font size, the product's ingredient, calorie and alcohol content. This information should also appear on all drinks lists and menus in bars, restaurants etc. to enable people to make informed choices.**

We also fully support the Expert Group's recommendation that health warnings should be on all alcohol labels, advertising and sponsorship. *There is strong public support for health information on labels, with 87% of Scots supportive of this.*

Health warnings would help the public to understand that alcohol is both addictive and carcinogenic and should not be seen as an ordinary, everyday commodity. **Current "drink responsibly" messages found in alcohol advertising and on some labelling should be replaced with mandatory, factual health warnings which are specified by an independent health body. Experience from tobacco suggests that these health warnings must be varied over time so they continue to have impact. In addition, all alcoholic products should state that, when pregnant, alcohol should be avoided completely.**

To help people make practical use of the guidelines, consideration should be given to other ways to support positive decisions, both at the point of purchase and when consuming alcohol at home. This could include limiting the number of units in a single serving (for example, a can) and banning the marketing of alcohol products in ways which imply they are essential or intended for regular consumption (for example marketing products as 'basic' or 'everyday value').

Reducing harm caused by alcohol

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