

# Minimum Pricing for Alcohol – The Facts



This factsheet provides information on minimum pricing for alcohol. Legislation to establish minimum pricing in Scotland was passed by the Scottish Parliament in May 2012. However, the implementation of minimum pricing has been delayed by a legal challenge from the global alcohol corporations who produce and sell alcohol. Minimum pricing will not come into force until the legal process is complete.

## What is minimum pricing?

A minimum price for alcohol sets the lowest price an alcoholic drink can be sold for. In Scotland, it is proposed that the minimum price will be 50p per unit of alcohol. Stronger drinks that contain more units of alcohol will have a higher minimum price than drinks that contain less alcohol. When minimum pricing is introduced, a can of Tennent's lager containing 2 units of alcohol will have to cost at least £1. Shops and bars will be able to charge more than £1 if they want but definitely not less.

## Why do we need minimum pricing?

Alcohol is much cheaper to buy now than it was in the past. If you think about the price of alcohol in relation to average wages, alcohol is much more affordable today than it was 30 years ago. In fact it is 60% more affordable today – particularly in supermarkets and other off-sales, where we now buy most of our alcohol. When something becomes more affordable, people tend to buy (and consume) more of it. The more we drink, the more alcohol-related diseases and social problems increase. To reduce the health and social harm caused by alcohol, we need to reduce how much people in Scotland drink. **Twenty Scots die every single week because of alcohol** and the harm that alcohol causes has a devastating impact on individuals, families and communities.

## Who will benefit from minimum pricing?

Minimum pricing works by reducing harmful drinking and this will benefit people drinking too much, as well as their families, their friends and the people they work with. In Canada, where minimum pricing is in place, it has resulted in a reduction in the amount people drink, with fewer hospital admissions and fewer alcohol-related deaths. Minimum pricing is particularly effective at reducing the amount of alcohol drunk by harmful drinkers as they tend to buy most of the cheap alcohol that is affected by minimum pricing. For people drinking heavily, even small reductions in consumption can have big health benefits. Minimum pricing will also help to prevent alcohol problems from developing in the first place, by making it more difficult for people to become dependent on alcohol.

## Which drinks will be affected?

Minimum pricing won't affect every alcoholic drink – only those sold at less than 50p per unit. Drinks like own brand vodka or gin, strong white cider and super strength lager will be affected. You can buy some drinks now for just 20p a unit. **Minimum pricing is targeted at cheap, strong alcohol sold in supermarkets and off-licences.** It will not really affect pubs, clubs and restaurants because their drinks are already sold at more than 50p a unit.

## Surely price doesn't matter to people who are alcohol-dependent?

Minimum pricing won't stop all addiction and dependence overnight. People struggling with serious alcohol problems often spend all their spare cash on alcohol. When minimum pricing is introduced it is likely that dependent drinkers will continue to buy as much alcohol as they can afford, at least initially, **but the same amount of money will buy less alcohol**. For example, if someone spends their weekly funds on 200 units of alcohol at a cost of 20p per unit, then a minimum price of 50p per unit will mean that they can only afford to buy 80 units of alcohol. Of course, drinking 80 units of alcohol a week is still harmful to health, but it is less harmful than drinking 200 units a week. Preventing the sale of cheap, strong alcohol will reduce the alcohol consumption of vulnerable drinkers, leading to less health damage and ultimately fewer deaths.

## Will people find other ways to get alcohol if the price goes up?

It is often suggested that dependent drinkers will find ways round price increases by turning to illicit alcohol or stealing alcohol, or money to buy alcohol. However, there is no real evidence to back this up. A study of ill drinkers in Edinburgh found almost no reports of such behaviour in the patients interviewed. Dependent drinkers are more likely to report stopping drinking once their weekly money is spent.

## Will it mean people living in poverty suffer more?

Most people (80%) on the lowest incomes either don't drink alcohol at all or drink moderately. However, a minority of people living in deprived areas drink at harmful levels and are more likely to have a serious illness or die as a result of their drinking. Minimum pricing will impact more on the consumption of harmful drinkers on low incomes, but they will benefit most in terms of improved health and wellbeing. People who don't drink very much very often will not really be affected by minimum pricing – the extra cost will only be about 29p a week.

## When will minimum pricing come into force in Scotland?

Minimum pricing will only come into force in Scotland after the alcohol industry's legal challenge is finished and the courts rule that minimum price is a legal measure. The legal process could take up to another two years to complete.

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