



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Act 2018 –

Your Questions Answered



How big is Wales' problem with alcohol?



By way of only a brief illustration;

in 2017 in Wales, there were

540

alcohol-related deaths.



This was up from

504

alcohol-related deaths in 2016.



In 2017/18 there were also nearly

55,000

alcohol-related hospital admissions.

In addition to the devastation this causes to individuals and to those around them, the impact of the excessive consumption of alcohol in Wales is also estimated to cost the NHS

£159 million every year.



Why does the Welsh Government think that increasing the price of alcohol will make a difference though? Aren't you just penalising the very people who need your help?

Put simply, we know that price matters. Evidence demonstrates there is a link between drinking at harmful levels and the availability of cheap alcohol.

We think that alcohol policy in Wales requires a variety of approaches, which taken together, can generate change. We consider that minimum pricing can play an important role as part of the Welsh Government's wider and ongoing approach to promote a healthier relationship with alcohol.



What is a minimum price for alcohol?

A minimum price would set a floor price, meaning that alcohol could not be sold or supplied below that price. It would not increase the price of every drink, only those which are currently sold or supplied at below any minimum price.

Under the Act, the applicable minimum price will be calculated by combining the minimum unit price (the MUP) as will be specified in regulations, the strength of the alcohol and its volume.

This formula specifically allows us to target those drinks currently sold at an unacceptably low price relative to their alcohol content, such as some cheap spirits and white ciders.



What difference will a minimum price make to the cost of alcohol?

That will depend on the quantity and strength of the alcohol consumed. Minimum unit pricing is specifically targeted at cheap, strong drinks.

Evidence suggests that those who drink within the lower risk drinking guidelines of no more than 14 units a week will consequently only be marginally affected because they consume a smaller amount of alcohol and also because they do not tend to buy as much of the cheaper alcohol that would be most affected by a minimum price.

Any small increase in the cost of alcohol to moderate drinkers has to be seen in the context of the total costs to individuals and to society of alcohol misuse.



What benefits will minimum pricing bring?

We expect to see a reduction in the significant and widespread harms caused by the excessive consumption of alcohol.

Before and since introducing its minimum pricing legislation to the National Assembly for Wales, the Welsh Government commissioned the Sheffield Alcohol Research Group to estimate the impact of minimum unit pricing policies in Wales.

That evidence concluded that minimum unit pricing would be effective in reducing alcohol consumption among hazardous, and particularly harmful drinkers, and that these reductions in consumption would lead to reductions in alcohol-related deaths and hospitalisations.

It also concluded that moderate drinkers would experience only small impacts on their alcohol consumption and spending. This is because they tend to buy alcohol which would be subject to little or no increase in price under the minimum unit pricing policy.

MUP is also expected to have an important impact on reducing health inequalities, by reducing levels of consumption amongst hazardous and harmful drinkers in the most deprived areas of Wales.



Didn't the Scottish Government's minimum unit pricing legislation end up in court?

The Scottish minimum pricing legislation was challenged by the alcohol industry. But, the outcome of that challenge was that the UK's Supreme Court dismissed the appeal by the alcohol industry and unanimously upheld the legality of the Scottish legislation. It found that minimum pricing is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

Our legislation pursues similar aims to the Scottish legislation, namely to target hazardous and harmful drinking.



Is this not the nanny state telling people what to do?

No. People will still be free to make their own choices.

But the Welsh Government is committed to further improving and protecting the health of the people of Wales. We're not telling people what to do but we do want people to think about what and how much they drink. The sad fact is that too many of us are drinking too much and this can affect our health and wellbeing.

There is compelling evidence, collected over many decades, that the excessive intake of alcohol causes harm and the likelihood of harm is proportionate to the amount of alcohol consumed.



Is minimum unit pricing the only action the Welsh Government is taking to reduce alcohol consumption?

No, far from it. As we have continued to emphasise, we (along with many stakeholders) believe that minimum pricing for alcohol can help reduce alcohol consumption and harm as part of a wider package of measures which are contained in our Substance Misuse Strategy.

Other measures include the provision of treatment and support for those who need help. Welsh Government provides nearly **£50 million per year** to fund these types of services – including ring-fenced money to support children and young people.



Will minimum unit pricing not just result in additional revenues for supermarkets?

Minimum pricing for alcohol is not a tax and so any increase in revenue would accrue to alcohol retailers (which would include smaller shops and pubs as well as supermarkets) and not the Welsh Government.

Although the evidence commissioned by the Welsh Government estimates additional revenue for the industry as a whole, no-one knows where in the supply chain this revenue will fall.

The Welsh Government will also continue, where appropriate, to work with the alcohol industry through the Welsh Government Alcohol Industry Network on matters to reduce alcohol-related harm.





Has the Welsh Government thought about the wider economic impact of minimum pricing? For example, what about people who work in the drinks industry?

In addition to being effective in reducing alcohol consumption among hazardous and, particularly, harmful drinkers, evidence suggests that minimum unit pricing as a policy will result in wider societal benefits too.

Evidence commissioned by the Welsh Government estimates that it will be associated with a reduction in health harms, crime and workplace absences.

This includes reduced direct healthcare costs; savings from reduced crime; savings from reduced workplace absence; and a financial valuation of the health benefits, measured in terms of quality adjusted life years.

By tackling alcohol misuse we can address these issues and consequently improve the Welsh economy, not damage it.



What is the process and timescale for consulting on the MUP level which will be set?

The Welsh Government recently consulted on its preferred level of the MUP of 50p. A summary of the consultation has been published and is available here:

<https://beta.gov.wales/setting-minimum-unit-price-alcohol>



When will minimum unit pricing be implemented?

The Welsh Government intends to lay regulations before the National Assembly for Wales later in 2019, specifying a 50p MUP, for its consideration. Plans for implementation will continue.

**If you have any additional questions or would like further information – please contact:
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Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.