

## Improving Scotland's Health: Minimum Unit Pricing of Alcohol

### Consultation response from Cancer Research UK

#### About Cancer Research UK<sup>1</sup>

1. Cancer Research UK is the world's leading cancer charity dedicated to saving lives through research. The charity's pioneering work has been at the heart of the progress that has already seen survival rates in the UK double in the last forty years. In 2016/17, we spent £432 million on research in institutes, hospitals and universities across the UK – including over £34 million in Scotland – at our two research centres in Glasgow and Edinburgh as well as funding research in Aberdeen, Dundee and Stirling. We receive no funding from the Government for our research. Our ambition is to see three in four patients survive cancer by 2034.

#### Introduction

2. We strongly support the UK Supreme Court's decision to confirm the legality of Scotland's world-leading minimum unit pricing (MUP) legislation. Evidence ranging from modelling to case studies indicates that MUP can help reduce the affordability and consumption of alcohol in Scotland. MUP should form part of a range of mechanisms to reduce alcohol harm.
3. We welcome the Scottish Government's consultation on legislation which sets an MUP of 50p per unit. We agree that 50p is the most appropriate starting limit, but believe this limit should be reviewed regularly and kept in line with factors including inflation. We are keen for all UK nations to adopt a uniform limit, to support a future implementation of MUP across the UK.

#### Alcohol, cancer and harm

4. Alcohol consumption is the third biggest preventable risk factor for cancer.<sup>2</sup> Alcohol is a major risk factor for cancer and been classified as a Group 1 carcinogen by the International Agency for Research into Cancer (IARC; part of the World Health Organisation) since 1988.<sup>3, 4</sup> Alcohol consumption has been linked to around 12,800 cancer cases in the UK, and is linked with an increased risk of seven types of cancer (mouth and upper throat, larynx, oesophageal, breast in women, liver and bowel).<sup>5</sup> Alcohol consumption rates are higher in Scotland than in the rest of the UK, with 17% more alcohol sold per adult in Scotland in 2016 than in England and Wales.<sup>6</sup>
5. Alcohol is also implicated in a wide range of social problems, particularly crime and workplace absences. In combination, these health and social problems impose a substantial burden on public services and the wider economy. A 2010 study commissioned by the Scottish Government estimated the total cost of alcohol-related harm in Scotland to be at least £3.6 billion per year.<sup>7</sup>

#### Benefits of a 50p MUP limit

6. We support an initial 50p MUP limit because it has the best potential to help prevent alcohol related cancers, reduce mortality and reduce financial pressure on the NHS in Scotland. We believe that 50p is currently the most appropriate pricing limit for Scotland. A 50p limit was recommended by the UK Chief Medical Officer in 2008,<sup>8</sup> assessed as likely to be effective by academics,<sup>9</sup> and advocated by groups such as the Alcohol Health Alliance.<sup>10</sup> Lower limits will not deliver the required health benefits, while the potential impacts of higher limits have not yet been fully assessed.
7. The latest research by the University of Sheffield identified that introducing an MUP of 50p in Scotland could lead to around 2,000 fewer hospital admissions and over 120 fewer deaths per year, with the strongest impact felt among people living in poverty.<sup>11</sup> Some modelling scenarios suggest that the reduction in deaths per year (after 20 years) from a 50p MUP could exceed over twice that of a 40p MUP, with a greater proportionate difference for hospital admission reductions. Earlier economic modelling suggested a potential £942 million of savings in societal costs over 10 years, which included £114 million in direct NHS cost reductions.<sup>12</sup>
8. A 50p MUP is effective in targeting the heaviest drinkers at the biggest risk of harm, rather than moderate consumers. Modelling indicates that a 50p MUP will reduce annual alcohol consumption among moderate drinkers by around four units, while consumption among hazardous drinkers will fall by around 35 units and consumption among harmful drinkers by almost 250 units.<sup>13</sup> Moderate drinks are only estimated to spend around an extra £2 per year.<sup>14</sup>
9. MUP may also help reduce health inequalities. Price dominates public product choice and consumption, with strong white cider – a product likely to be affected by MUP – forming 25% of the alcohol intake for harmful and hazardous drinkers in all except the most affluent social economic groups.<sup>15</sup> Consumption of white cider creates significant health inequalities in lower socio-economic groups.<sup>16</sup>

#### Reviewing the 50p limit

10. We support reviewing the limit on a frequent basis, with a view to increase it in line with factors including inflation. The first step should be for the Scottish Government to commit to reviewing the 50p MUP limit within two years of the date of its implementation (on 1 May 2018), once the policy has become embedded. Although a 50p limit is currently proportionate and will yield significant benefits, its probable effectiveness will have declined since the policy became legislation in 2012. This is due to inflation and market changes, which have reduced the proportion of off-trade alcohol sold below 50p per unit from 72% in 2010 to 51% in 2016.<sup>17 18</sup>
11. The Scottish Government should also collaborate with other UK nations when determining any pricing changes in the future. One avenue for discussion could be through regular chief medical officer meetings. The process for reviewing the initial limit should be transparent and



evidence-based. It is imperative that price reviews place the interests of public health as the priority mechanism for its revision.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Registered charity in England and Wales (1089464), Scotland (SC041666) and the Isle of Man (1103). Registered as a company limited by guarantee in England & Wales No.4325234. Registered address: Angel Building, 407 St John Street, London EC1V 4AD
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- <sup>5</sup> Cancer Research UK (2015) How alcohol causes cancer ([website](#))
- <sup>6</sup> NHS Health Scotland (2017). *Alcohol Price in Scotland 2016*. Edinburgh: NHS Health Scotland ([pdf](#))
- <sup>7</sup> York Health Economic Consortium (2010) The Societal Cost of Alcohol Misuse in Scotland for 2007 ([pdf](#))
- <sup>8</sup> House of Commons Library (2017) Briefing Paper – Alcohol: minimum pricing ([pdf](#))
- <sup>9</sup> Meng Y., Sadler, S., Gell, L., Holmes, J. and Brennan, A. (2014) 'Model-based appraisal of minimum unit pricing for alcohol in Wales: An adaptation of the Sheffield Alcohol Policy Model version 3', Sheffield: ScHARR, University of Sheffield ([pdf](#))
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