



Realising our rights: How to protect people from alcohol marketing

Alcohol Focus Scotland and the international Alcohol Marketing Expert Network are calling for countries to introduce statutory restrictions on how alcohol is marketed, following the launch of their new report.

The report presents evidence of the impact of alcohol marketing on people with or at risk of an alcohol problem, children and young people, and the general population.

Drawing on international experiences from countries who already have restrictions, the Network makes recommendations for how countries can best regulate alcohol marketing, as well as how these can apply in Scotland. The Network's recommendations cover action across the full 'marketing mix' including promotion and advertising, product packaging, the retail environment and pricing.

At a well-attended launch event, members of the expert network, Professor Sally Casswell of Massey University, New Zealand, and Tom Bennett of the Scottish Recovery Consortium, summarised the evidence on the need for change and the real-life impact marketing restrictions could have on people in recovery.



[Find out more from AFS.](#)



Scottish Government MUP review underway

Earlier this week Maree Todd, Minister for Public Health announced that a review of the level of the minimum unit price is now underway.

The Minister said “A review of the current level of 50p per unit was delayed by the pandemic. This extensive exercise is now underway and I can confirm that it will be completed in late 2023.

“It is intended that any new price would come into effect from May 1, 2024, subject to parliamentary scrutiny and approval.”

Alcohol Focus Scotland welcome the announcement and urge the Scottish Government to increase the minimum price to at least 65 pence per unit. Alison Douglas, chief executive said, “This would not only account for inflation since the Parliament approved the policy ten years ago, but also set it at a level that will save more lives and prevent a new generation from developing a problematic relationship with alcohol.”



New NCD Prevention Report: Mapping Future Harm

Three in five people (62%) in Scotland would welcome restrictions on alcohol advertising, sponsorship and promotions online, in public spaces and at sport and cultural events.

The NCD Prevention Coalition, made up of AFS and 8 other leading health charities, has published a new report showing the support and urgency for action to tackle preventable deaths from non-communicable diseases in Scotland.

Laura Mahon, Deputy Chief Executive of Alcohol Focus Scotland, said: “To make a concrete difference to people’s health we need evidence-based solutions.

Introducing restrictions on how and where alcohol can be marketed, alongside increasing the minimum unit price to at least 65p would save and improve lives, particularly for those living in our poorest communities who feel the negative effects most.”

 [Read the briefing and report.](#)



POLICY

No place for cheap alcohol: the potential value of minimum pricing for protecting lives

Well-chosen pricing policies can help countries lower alcohol consumption and harms as well as benefit economies, says new World Health Organization Europe report.

Although pricing policies and taxation are among the most effective measures that policy-makers can use to address alcohol harms, they remain underutilized across the WHO European region.

Alison Douglas, chief executive of Alcohol Focus Scotland, said: “Alcohol Focus Scotland welcomes today’s report from the World Health Organization Europe recommending that countries follow Scotland’s lead and adopt minimum unit pricing (MUP) to tackle the huge harm alcohol causes across Europe.

“So far in Scotland we have seen encouraging results with a significant reduction in how much we are drinking since the introduction of the policy, a small decrease in hospital admissions from liver disease, and an initial decline in deaths from alcohol. Importantly, few unintended consequences have been found.

“Now we need to ensure the policy is optimised. The effects of 50p per unit have been eroded by inflation and we urgently need to increase the price to save and improve more lives.

 [Read the report.](#)



Contents unknown: How alcohol labelling still fails consumers

Action on alcohol labelling is urgently needed, says new report from the Alcohol Health Alliance (AHA).

The AHA and member organisations, including Alcohol Focus Scotland, examined 369 alcohol products across the UK to find out what information is included on labels.

The study found that:

- 65% included the current CMO low-risk drinking guidelines
- 20% provided a full ingredient list
- 5% provided full nutritional information

The report recommends that the UK government step in and require alcohol products to display this information on the label.

 [Read the study](#) and the AHA's recommendations.



RESEARCH

Monitoring and Evaluating Scotland's Alcohol Strategy (MESAS) - Monitoring Report 2022

"Reducing how much we drink must remain a priority" says Alcohol Focus Scotland chief executive, Alison Douglas.

In 2021, 9.4 litres of pure alcohol were sold per adult. This averages to 18.1 units per adult per week - substantially higher than the Chief Medical Officers' low-risk weekly drinking guidelines of maximum 14 units per week.

The report also highlights the stark inequality that exists. In the 10% least deprived areas of Scotland, rates of alcohol-specific deaths were nearly five times higher, and alcohol-related hospital stays were nearly eight times higher, than in the 10% most deprived.

To reduce preventable alcohol harms, AFS recommends that the Scottish Government:

- optimises minimum unit pricing (MUP), bringing it at least in line with inflation
 - restricts alcohol marketing
 - reduces alcohol availability
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- increases investment in support and treatment services

 [Read the report.](#)

RESEARCH

Evaluating the impact of minimum unit pricing (MUP) in Scotland on people who are drinking at harmful levels

No clear evidence of a change in consumption or severity of dependence among those drinking at harmful levels or people with alcohol dependence following the introduction of MUP says new study.

Dependent drinkers were not the target of MUP, but researching its effects on them adds to the body of evidence around MUP. There was little evidence found of other negative consequences in this population following the introduction of MUP, such as increased crime, a shift to the use of illicit substances or acute withdrawal.

People with alcohol dependence were also found to have a limited awareness and understanding of MUP and reported receiving little information or support before its introduction.

The lead researcher, Professor John Holmes, notes that the research must be understood in the context of previous evidence. For example, previous research shows that MUP reduced alcohol sales, particularly for households which were previously purchasing the most alcohol.

 [Read the study.](#)

 [Find out more in a Twitter thread by the lead author, Professor John Holmes.](#)


 **CONSULTATIONS**

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AFS Response to New Cancer Strategy

Alcohol Focus Scotland provided **written evidence** to the Scottish Government consultation on the new cancer strategy. Alcohol is one of the largest modifiable risk factors for cancer in Scotland, and up to 40% of cancers can be prevented through reducing harmful habits, such as alcohol consumption, in line with Scotland's wider public health priorities. Increasing cancer prevention in the short term will allow resources to be spent on the other aspects of the cancer journey in the long term. To help reduce harmful alcohol consumption and reduce cancers caused by alcohol, AFS recommends:

- 1) Maintaining and uprating minimum unit pricing (MUP)
- 2) Banning or restricting alcohol marketing
- 3) Raising public awareness through mandating alcohol labelling

 **For more information on the link between alcohol and cancer, read our full response.**

AFS Response to Online Advertising Programme

Alcohol Focus Scotland provided **written evidence** to the UK Government Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport consultation on the online advertising programme. The consultation puts forward several options for changing the regulation of online advertising. The evidence around marketing's persuasiveness is clear. Children and young people are even more susceptible to alcohol marketing, with evidence showing that exposure to alcohol advertising decreases the age at which they start drinking and also increases their consumption. People with or at risk of alcohol problems are also triggered by marketing's effects. Unrestricted online marketing fails to limit these groups' exposure. AFS supports introducing statutory regulation.

 **Read our response.**



75th World Health Assembly adopts the WHO Global Alcohol Action Plan

Public health leaders from around the world agreed to adopt the WHO Global Alcohol Action Plan, making the reduction of harmful alcohol use a public health priority.

Harmful alcohol use causes approximately 3 million deaths each year, while the overall burden of alcohol-related disease and injury remains staggeringly high. Ten years after the implementation of the WHO Global strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol, WHO regions have developed and implemented alcohol policies unevenly, with resources and capacities failing to match the issue's magnitude. Therefore, the WHO Executive Board has called for accelerated action to reduce the harmful use of alcohol.



[Read more from WHO.](#)



RESEARCH

The Ubiquitous Experience of Alcohol Industry Involvement in Science

Contact with industry is unavoidable for alcohol researchers says new study.

The study, published in the Journal of Studies on Alcohol, aimed to explore the experience of researchers who had no relationship with the alcohol industry, including how industry involvement in alcohol science more broadly had impacted their research work. Researchers from the University of York conducted semi-structured interviews with senior researchers working on alcohol policy who had not received any form of payment from the alcohol industry or performed any unpaid work for alcohol industry

RESEARCH

The public health playbook: ideas for challenging the corporate playbook

Public health actors need their own strategies to counter the corporate playbook and advance health and wellbeing.

The corporate playbook consists of a range of coordinated and sophisticated strategies commercial actors use to protect business interests, many of which come at the expense of public health.


Published in The Lancet, the researchers propose an initial eight strategies for this public health playbook:

- expand public health training and coalitions

companies.

The researchers concluded that despite not working with industry, contact is unavoidable as the alcohol industry extensively monitors research and researchers through conferences and policy-related events.

 [Read the study.](#)


 [Read a summary by the lead author, Dr Gemma Mitchell.](#)

- increase public sector resources
- link with and learn from social movements to foster collective solidarity
- protect public health advocates from industry threats
- develop and implement rigorous conflict of interest safeguards
- monitor and expose corporate activities,
- debunk corporate arguments
- leverage diverse commercial interests.

 [Find out more.](#)

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