Newsletter from Alcohol Focus Scotland
View this email in your browser

March 2024

Contents

- **HSCSC votes in favour of continuing and increasing MUP**
- **New PHS Dashboard reveals true scale of alcohol harm in Scotland**
- **Alcohol related hospital admissions down but alcohol harm still too high**
- **Questioning initiatives funded by the alcohol industry**
- **Junk food ads banned from Sheffield City Council-owned billboards**
- **Overstatement undermines health interventions**
- **Gender-responsive approaches to the acceptability, availability and affordability of alcohol**
- **Consultation on the united Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act**
- **Restricting promotions of food high in fat, sugar or salt**
- **The impact of introducing alcohol-free beer options in bars and public houses on alcohol sales and revenue: A randomised crossover field trial**
- **Alcohol and the Brain**

UPDATE

HSCSC votes in favour of continuing and increasing MUP

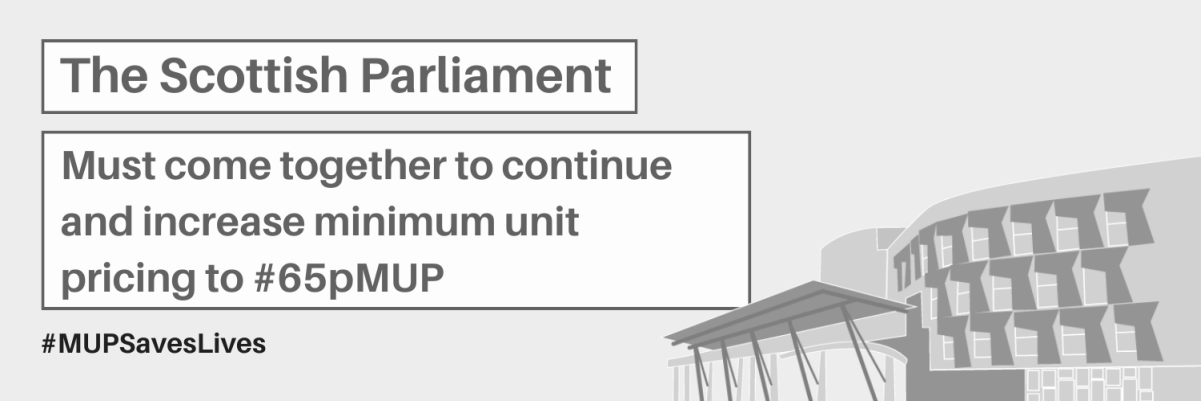
The Health, Social Care and Sport Committee has now voted in favour of retaining and uprating MUP to 65p – with strong cross-party support.

The Committee voted after more than 80 organisations from across Scotland and beyond, including dozens of medical, faith organisations and charities, **wrote to them** calling for

The Committee's decision came on a day when Public Health Scotland **released figures** showing the true scale of alcohol harm, with 2820 people estimated to die from alcohol each year when deaths from conditions such as alcohol-related cancers and cardiovascular disease are counted. This is more than twice as high as alcohol-specific death figures that are reported annually.

Responding to the news, **Alison Douglas, CEO of Alcohol Focus Scotland said** the vote is "another big step forward towards renewing and uprating the minimum unit price (MUP) for alcohol to 65p per unit, and we're delighted that there is strong cross-party support for this policy.

Read more about the letter
Read the Official Report
Read our reaction to the vote



UPDATE

New PHS Dashboard reveals true scale of alcohol harm in Scotland

Public Health Scotland has published a new **Alcohol Dashboard**, which includes figures on alcohol attributable deaths and hospital admissions for the first time since a **Scottish Public Health Observatory Report in 2018**.

In addition to the 1185 deaths wholly attributable to alcohol in 2020, reported as alcohol-specific deaths, there were 1635 deaths partially attributable to alcohol. This means that in total there were 2820 deaths due to alcohol in 2020, more than double the number reported in annual death statistics.

Commenting on the new Alcohol Dashboard figures, **Alison Douglas, CEO of Alcohol Focus Scotland said:** "We welcome the launch of Public Health Scotland's Alcohol Dashboard which can help inform policy and practice on reducing alcohol harm in Scotland both nationally and locally. It is particularly useful to have new data on alcohol

massive burden alcohol is currently placing on our NHS."

Read more

Alcohol related hospital admissions down but alcohol harm still too high

New figures published by Public Health Scotland have shown that there were 31,206 alcohol related hospital admissions (stays) in Scotland in 2022/23. This represents a significant 11% reduction on hospital admissions in 2021/22 at 35,187.

Responding to the data, **Alison Douglas, CEO of Alcohol Focus Scotland said**: “While welcome, this reduction in alcohol related hospital admissions is no cause for complacency. The level of admissions due to alcohol remains high and represents an entirely preventable burden on our already overstretched NHS.

“Worryingly, there is evidence of increasing inequality in these data, with people in our most deprived communities now seven times more likely to be hospitalised due to alcohol than those in our most well-off communities – compared with six times more likely in the previous year.”

Read more

Questioning initiatives funded by the alcohol industry

The Scotch Whisky Association (SWA) have recently announced an investment of £300,000 to reduce young people’s drinking.

industry-funded Community Alcohol Partnerships (CAPs) in the UK, found little evidence of their effectiveness and concluded that “Their main role may be as an alcohol industry corporate social responsibility measure which is intended to limit the reputational damage associated with alcohol-related anti-social behaviour.”

The existence of and support for such initiatives is also used by Big Alcohol as an alternative to evidence-based policies which threaten how they market and sell their products, such as minimum unit price which SWA delayed for over six years at a cost of hundreds of lives.

Alison Douglas
CEO, Alcohol Focus Scotland

UPDATE

Junk food ads banned from Sheffield City Council-owned billboards

Sheffield City Council has banned adverts for unhealthy food, pollution and alcohol from all authority-owned hoardings, online media, and sponsorship opportunities.

The ban also covers short-term loans, low or zero alcohol drinks from alcoholic brands, fossil fuel products, some breast or infant milk formulas, petrol, diesel and hybrid plug-in vehicles, gambling and betting products, and airlines and airports. The ban is expected to come into force next month.

Greg Fell, Sheffield’s public health director, said that when Transport for London banned junk food ads, the loss of income predicted by some never actually happened.

AdFreeCities has reported that in Sheffield, 60% of advertisements were found in the poorest areas of the city, while just 2% of adverts were found in the most affluent locations.

Learn more

POLICY

Overstatement undermines health interventions

The Social Market Foundation (SMF) has launched the final briefing in a trilogy exploring the merits and political case for more interventionist public health measures. The final briefing, ***Weighing the pounds***, evaluated economic arguments for and against public health interventions, finding that exaggeration on both sides, but especially from industry, is missing the bigger picture of being able to save/improve lives.

Economic arguments are often used to resist public health measures, and increasingly to promote them, though they often confuse quite different types of costs and benefits. It is important to remember that a loss of spending in one particular sector will be at least partly offset by higher spending in others. Ultimately, the objective of public health interventions should be helping us live healthier, longer lives – economic gains, which we have seen are real, are just a bonus.

The **first briefing** in the trilogy looked at the effectiveness of interventionism, while the **second briefing** explored the political constraints on implementing more interventionist policies.

Read the briefing

Gender-responsive approaches to the acceptability, availability and affordability of alcohol

In a **new briefing**, the World Health Organization (WHO) highlights that gender-related norms persist in our societies, including in the consumption of alcohol.

Despite knowing that men and women consume alcohol differently and are affected by its harm differently, alcohol control policies remain gender blind. Highly gendered approaches to alcohol marketing and gender differences in patterns of alcohol consumption and its associated harm are well documented. Relatively little evidence has examined the different effects of population-level alcohol control policies on different genders, and even less has addressed how gender intersects with socioeconomic status, age, ethnicity, and other factors.

The WHO calls on governments to develop alcohol-control policies that address dimensions of acceptability, availability and affordability and incorporate considerations of gender and gender equity. Additionally, decisionmakers should consider the inclusivity of existing and future alcohol control policies. The WHO also calls on researchers to analyse and present data separately for men and women, rather than just controlling for sex. They note the importance of monitoring and reporting direct and indirect policy effects by gender.

Read the briefing

CONSULTATIONS

Consultation on the united Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act

The UNCRC has already been incorporated into Scottish law, but Scottish Ministers are required to publish guidance to help public authorities understand and fulfil their duties according to the act, helping to ensure that children's rights are proactively protected, respected and fulfilled. The Scottish Government are seeking views on the following draft statutory guidance:

- **Part 2: Compatibility with the UNCRC requirements, and child rights-respecting practice**
- **Part 3: Reporting duty of listed authorities**

Find out more and respond by 16 May 2024

CONSULTATIONS

Restricting promotions of food high in fat, sugar or salt

The Scottish Government are consulting on the detail of proposed regulations to restrict the promotions of food and drink high in fat, sugar or salt (HFSS) where they are sold to the public, including across retail and out of home settings, both in-store and online.

Read more and respond before 21 May 2024

CONSULTATIONS

Draft Charter of Rights

The National Collaborative have issued a consultation on a **draft Charter of Rights** for people affected by substance use.

This consultation aims to capture people's views and opinions on the draft Charter of Rights, and inform its continued development.

Read more and respond before 3 June 2024

RESEARCH

The impact of introducing alcohol-free beer options in bars and public houses on alcohol sales and revenue: A randomised crossover field trial

A **study** carried out by Bristol City Council and the Tobacco and Alcohol Research Group (TARG) at the University of Bristol has found that making alcohol-free beer more available on draught in pubs and bars may help people switch from alcoholic beer.

A group of 14 pubs and bars across Bristol temporarily changed the drinks they offered. When alcohol-free option was available, venues sold 51 fewer alcoholic pints on average. This was replaced by an equal increase in sales of the non-alcoholic options. There was no impact on the money earned by the pubs.

Dr Angela Atwood, associate professor at TARG, said: "This does not restrict consumer

Read the study

Alcohol and the Brain

A group of international alcohol experts have come together to develop a new report presenting the evidence regarding alcohol's effect on the brain.

The report explains how alcohol physiologically affects the brain, why younger brains are so susceptible to harm, how alcohol is a risk factor in depression and suicide, and how alcohol ages the brain faster than it would age otherwise.

The authors conclude that reducing alcohol consumption, both total consumption as well as binge drinking, is arguably the most important way to promote cognitive and neurological health and prevent or reduce brain harms.

They advocate for:

- effective alcohol control policies, including raising the price and reducing the availability of alcohol
- health care screening and treatment resources including medications to treat alcohol dependence
- individual-level information and behaviour change informed by drinking guidelines

Read the report

166 Buchanan Street, Glasgow G1 2LW
0141 572 6700
enquiries@alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk
www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk
@alcoholfocus

Copyright © 2024 Alcohol Focus Scotland, All rights reserved.
You can **update your preferences** or **unsubscribe from this list**.