



Children in Wales
Plant yng Nghymru

Consultation response

National Assembly for Wales: Health, Social Care and Sports Committee inquiry into the general principles of the Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Bill

Children in Wales is the national umbrella organisation in Wales for children and young people's issues, bringing organisations and individuals from all disciplines and sectors together to speak with one voice, to exchange knowledge and practice, and to provide opportunities to enhance policy and practice through shared learning. One of our core aims is to make the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) a reality in Wales. Children in Wales campaigns for sustainable quality services for all children and young people, with special attention for children in need and works to ensure children and young people have a voice in issues that affect them. Children in Wales facilitates the voice of children and young people to influence government policy making through its 'Cymru Ifanc/Young Wales' programme of work.

For further information on the work of Children in Wales, please see www.childreninwales.org.uk and www.youngwales.wales

1. Our Response

1.1 Children in Wales welcomes the opportunity to inform the **Health, Social Care and Sports Committee inquiry into the general principles of the Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Bill** and the extent to which the Bill will contribute to improving and protecting the health and well-being of the population of Wales, and more specifically in the context of our response, children and young people.

1.2 We are in support of the General Principles of the Bill. The research evidence is clear and unequivocal in that hazardous levels of drinking has a negative impact on the health outcomes of individuals and presents a number of challenges and adverse costs to their families and to society as a whole. We support the Ministers assertion based on robust

academic research which Committee members will be familiar with that *"There is a very clear and direct link between levels of excessive drinking and the availability of cheap alcohol"*

1.3 For children and young people, the consequences of living in a household where a parent/carer or another family member consumes harmful levels of alcohol can be destructive, compromising their own immediate and long term health and wellbeing outcomes. Children and young people exposed to adverse childhood experiences and trauma in their formative years, including through pregnancy and during the first 1000 days, have increased vulnerabilities to poor health, education and employment outcomes, and are far more likely to develop long term problems and adopt health harming behaviours as adults. There are also indirect consequences for children in terms of the detrimental impact on household budgets from excessive and dependent drinking within the family home.

1.4 Having a chance of good health outcomes is not only an economic asset, but also a child's right.

1.5 The **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** sets out a set of rights to which all children and young people are entitled to, including Articles 6, 24 and 33 which seek to promote and protect the health needs of all children, and eliminate health inequalities in health outcomes. The UN's supplementary General Comment 15 on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is also in place to support Governments delivery of their obligations to all children and young people.

1.6 Since devolution, the National Assembly for Wales and successive Welsh Governments have made great strides in championing, protecting and further enhancing children's rights through Wales specific legislation. The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 provides that Welsh Ministers have due regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) when exercising their functions, with similar duties placed on relevant public bodies at a local level through the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014.

1.7 We agree that a minimum cost of alcohol would be a means towards combatting alcohol related harm and is consistent with the Welsh Government approach towards prioritising 'Prevention' of harm as one of the 5 ways of working reinforced through the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

1.8 It cannot be the only means however, and must be part of a broader public health programme of work which seeks to improve whole population health outcomes alongside tackling socio economic deprivation and tackling poverty.

1.9 Alongside the proposals put forward to increase the minimum unit cost of alcohol, there has to be an on-going comprehensive education and awareness raising campaign for both parents and young people to inform and support individuals seeking to change harmful and adverse risk taking behaviours; to inform parents and young people about the risks and potential consequences of excessive drinking, and to inform on safe ways/point in time for parents/carers to appropriately introduce alcohol, and discussions around alcohol use to children. The **education elements are essential** given that it is questionable how responsive

young people as consumers of alcohol will be to any price increase as proposed by this legislation.

1.10 The Welsh Government and Public Bodies will also need to ensure that the necessary accessible bespoke specialist support services are in place throughout Wales, free at the point of use, to compliment and sit alongside the key role universal services are also taking.

1.11 Appropriate tailored education within a reformed curriculum for all children and young people, harnessing the expertise of the Third Sector, also has to be included, to ensure that they develop an understanding of the risks and are able to make informed choices around managing alcohol intake during adolescents.

2. Consultation with young people and those professionals who support

2.1 During December 2015, Children in Wales and Young Wales undertook a piece of work with professionals, parents and young people to ascertain their views on the prospect of the Welsh Government introducing legislation and a Minimum Unit Price for Alcohol in Wales.

2.2 Overall, comments proved favourable in terms of introducing a minimum unit price for alcohol, although it was recognised that some respondents believed that there would be no impact, or potentially some unintended consequences for individuals and employers which should be considered.

2.3 The following are some of the comments received to the question - **Do you think we should change the law to have a MUP for alcohol in Wales?**

Selection of responses from young people

- For some the cost going up would help them to consider drinking less and maybe a lifestyle change
- For some people it could mean that they go without other essentials to still buy the amount they usually drink. This could have a knock on affect to young families who are already on a low income.
- MUP will help to stop young people drinking too much. Young people would drink less if it costs more
- Young people will get it if they want it. Young people would get the money somehow
- MUP will help more adults drink within safe levels. Possibly parents would buy less
- Not sure that it would make a difference. If they want it they will get it
- People dependant on alcohol will still buy it
- MUP will be good for the Health Service. MUP will be good for employers
- Bargain booze – May have to close if they can't sell at cheaper prices
- May have an impact on the amount of staff (businesses) employ
- Depends of the cost they buy it in at.

Selection of responses of professionals working with children and young people

- The issue is not in the pubs, it's with people buying huge amounts of alcohol from supermarkets at such cheap prices.
- This charge would affect strong ciders - which tend to be the drink of choice of the dependent drinkers,
- A higher minimum price would reduce the habits of younger people, but dependent drinkers would probably put up with it.
- People are prepared to pay for alcohol so people will spend and get drunk whether a young person or not, however if the prices were higher for certain drinks currently marketed as being very cheap for the younger person to get drunk on, it may reduce the frequency or degree slightly.
- Addiction and abuse of anything isn't down to cost. People will come up with other ways to get what they need despite MUP.
- Educate the people at risk. (A need for) Advertising and informing the public on MUP
- The MUP is a drive to encourage responsible drinking where industry has failed
- Having a MUP on alcohol is not the answer, education and training starting at school level would be the first approach. The price of alcohol has increased every year yet we still have very high levels of alcohol related incidence and supermarket promoting purchasing alcohol in bulk buy
- I have worked as an alcohol therapist for six years and drug specialist for 11 years previously I strongly believe that if there was a minimum price of 50p a unit this would reduce the consumption of the white cider (nasty stuff) which has 18 units per bottle and being sold for £2.79.
- MUP would penalise low income adults who choose to drink responsibly - especially if they drink spirits or high %abv drinks
- Many people who are alcohol dependent will still need to drink and will be prepared to find alternative methods to meet their needs
- Another benefit would be that some people would be less likely to become dependent on the (currently cheap) high %abv white ciders etc. - due to the massive price increase, if MUP happens
- Is there the same plan in England? I can't see this working unless Scotland, England and Wales all do it. Without this there will just be an increase in drives over the border to stock up?
- Is the amount suggested enough? Underage drinking is not usually found to be the cheapest alcoholic products which 50p is aimed at and needs to set slightly higher. It is only one measure and needs to be part of a bigger education programme as supply often comes through parents/family where M.U.P. will not have a huge impact if not set high enough.

3. Closing Remarks

3.1 There are significant public health challenges to be tackled in Wales which this legislation in part will seek to address. However, the legislation has to be one important component of a wider programme of work informed by the growing evidence base which supports the shift towards a preventative agenda, informed by adopting a rights based approach. The success or otherwise of the Bill in meeting its objectives of tackling excessive

drinking and the harmful impact this can have on children and young people, will very much depend on the packages of measures put in place to support its delivery.

3.2 The state has a key role to play in providing the necessary leadership and direction which helps shape the social, economic and environmental conditions which are conducive to good health and averting health harms which could be avoided. Intervening to manage the cost of alcohol in an attempt to better protect individuals, and achieve improved current and future health outcomes for children, young people and their families is an intervention which Children in Wales are very much prepared to support.

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