**HRB report highlights public knowledge, attitudes and behaviour in relation to alcohol**

More than four out five people (85%) believe that current levels of alcohol consumption in Ireland are too high, according to the results of a new survey, *Alcohol: Public knowledge, attitudes and behaviour,* published today by the Health Research Board.

The survey, conducted and analysed by Ipsos MRBI, sought to measure Irish people’s knowledge, attitudes and behaviours in relation to alcohol consumption, marketing and selling of alcohol and current and potential responses to alcohol-related health and social harms.

The survey findings show that one in six people (17%) in Ireland did not drink alcohol in the 12 months prior to the survey and that very few people understand what a standard drink is - a measure containing 10 grams of alcohol- for example one glass of beer, one pub measure of spirits, or 100mls of wine. Only one in ten (9%) people know the recommended maximum number of standard drinks that they can safely consume in one week, 14 for women and 21 for men.

Of those surveyed, three in every four people (73%) believe that Irish society tolerates high levels of alcohol consumption. A considerable majority (72%) of the people surveyed say that they know someone who, in their opinion, drinks too much and 42% of this group say that this person is an immediate family member.

Three in every five (58%) do not believe the government are currently doing enough to reduce alcohol consumption and almost four in five (78%) people think the government has responsibility for introducing public health measures to address alcohol consumption. People’s responses to survey questions indicate support for implementing a number of the individual measures in the recently published *Report of the Working Group on a National Substance Misuse Strategy (for alcohol)\*.*

The majority support: labelling alcohol containers to include calories, alcoholic strength, ingredients and health warnings (82%-98%); introducing further measures to deal with alcohol and driving (84%-94%); restricting certain types of alcohol advertising (57%-80%); introducing minimum pricing (58%); seeking contributions to pay for social and health consequences resulting from excess alcohol use from the people who drink alcohol (61% -71%)

**Pricing and availability**

Three in five people (58%) support a minimum unit price for alcohol. Support is highest among those aged between 35-64 years at 65%. However, 21% of people would not support this action, with lack of support highest (33%) among the 18-24 age group.

Three quarters of those surveyed purchase alcohol in supermarkets. The survey revealed that it would take a price increase of 25% or more to get 67% of people to decrease the amount that they purchase. For example, a 25% increase on an average bottle of wine priced at €6.99 would increase its price to €8.74 and 67% of people (who would buy it at €6.99) would buy that bottle less often.

Overall, 25% of the people who shop in supermarkets would buy more alcohol if the price of alcohol was to decrease, notably 50% of 18-24 year olds claim they would buy more. Opinion is somewhat divided on whether special offers, or price reductions, encourage respondents to buy more alcohol than usual with 45% agreeing that they buy more alcohol and 39% disagreeing. Those aged 18-24 years are most likely to respond to such promotions with almost two-thirds (65%) saying that they buy more when alcohol is on special offer or when the price is reduced.

‘These results indicate that young people’s purchasing of alcohol is most influenced by pricing’, says Dr Jean Long at the Health Research Board.

Almost half (47%) of the population support reducing the number of outlets selling alcohol and 28% do not. Two-fifths (40%) support selling alcohol in separate premises to food and other household products, and 32% do not.

**Advertising and sponsorship**

People strongly support a variety of advertising restrictions including adverts being limited to the product and not the person who consumes the brand (78%), no alcohol advertising at the cinema for movies rated 17 years and under (80%), no alcohol advertising on TV and radio before 9.00 pm (76%), banning of advertising on social media (70%) and banning of alcohol adverts on billboards and bus stops (57%).

A ban on the alcohol industry sponsoring sporting and musical events is supported by 42% and 37% of people respectively. Support is somewhat higher among women (49% for sport and 45% for music) and in those 45 years or over (47% for sport and 46% for music). The main lack of support for discontinuing sponsorship is among men (54% for sport and 57% for music) and those under 44 years of age (51% for sport and 59% for music).

**Labelling**

The vast majority of respondents would like to see four categories of information on any drink container. These include; alcohol strength (98%), number of calories (82%), details of alcohol-related harms (95%) and list of ingredients (91%).

**Health and social costs**

A HSE commissioned report showed that in 2007, the health-related costs of alcohol were €1.2billion.[[1]](#footnote-1) Of those people surveyed, 61% believe that those who drink alcohol should contribute to health-related costs, 42% believe the alcohol industry should contribute, with 27% supporting state taxes contributing these costs.

The same study showed that public disorder-related costs in 2007 also amounted to €1.2billion. When asked, 71% surveyed said that individuals who drink alcohol should contribute, 30% believe the alcohol industry should contribute, while 22% support a state contribution through taxation.

**Alcohol and Driving**

Nine out of 10 (90%) do not agree that it is safe to drive after two alcoholic drinks. There is near universal support (94%) for the mandatory testing of drivers’ alcohol levels when involved in traffic accidents. More than eight out of 10 (84%) agree that those convicted of drink driving on more than one occasion should have an ‘alcohol lock’ fitted in their car. This indicates strong support for additional measures to address drink-driving.

‘This report provides evidence that the public thinks that our alcohol consumption is too high and that they support the government to introduce public health measures to reduce alcohol consumption in Ireland. The survey findings indicate people’s support for many of the individual measures to address alcohol consumption recommended in the *Report of the Working Group on a National Substance Misuse Strategy for alcohol*. The fact that the findings in this survey are consistent with general population surveys, surveys among school children and other public opinion surveys adds to the strength of the evidence,’ concludes Dr Long.

The survey was conducted by Ipsos MRBI on behalf of the Health Research Board. A total of 1,020 people from a nationally representative sample were interviewed in their own home. The age, gender and place of residence of the sample selected are representative of the 2011 Census population. The proportion of people who do and do not drink alcohol is consistent with the 2007 SLAN survey.

ENDS

For more information contact:

Gillian Markey

Health Research Board

**t** 00353 1 2345103

**m** 00353 87 2288514

**e** [gmarkey@hrb.ie](mailto:gmarkey@hrb.ie)

**Additional notes for editors**

\*List of measures recommended by the working group on a national substance misuse strategy for alcohol:

* + Labels on alcohol containers contain calories, strength, ingredients and health warnings
  + Measures to deal with alcohol and driving
  + Restrictions on advertising
  + Minimum unit price and measures to stop price promotions
  + The alcohol industry should contribute to the social and health costs of alcohol
  + Separation of the sale alcohol from food
  + Industry should not sponsor sports and music events

1. Byrne S (2011) Costs to society of problem alcohol use in Ireland. Dublin: Health Service Executive. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)