

Summary

The Northern Ireland Alcohol and Drug Alliance is calling for the introduction of a Minimum Unit Price on the sale of alcohol in Northern Ireland. Minimum unit pricing is shown to target cheap, high-strength alcohol, which is most often bought by people drinking at harmful levels. Evidence demonstrates that introducing minimum unit pricing in Northern Ireland will significantly reduce harmful drinking, cut alcohol-related deaths, and reduce hospital admissions.

What is Minimum Unit Pricing?

Put simply, the basic principle behind minimum unit pricing, or MUP, is that high-strength alcohol products cannot be sold at a low price.

MUP will set a legal 'floor price' for a unit of alcohol, which makes it illegal for retailers to sell it lower than that. The more units of alcohol in a drink, the stronger the content is and therefore the higher the price of the product.

Minimum unit pricing is a targeted way of making sure alcohol is sold at a sensible price and has been widely recommended as a way of increasing the price of drinks such as own-brand spirits and white cider, which have a very high content of alcohol but are usually very cheap.

On April 1 2018, a minimum unit price of 50 pence per unit was introduced in Scotland, where there are an average of 24 alcohol-related deaths a week and where excessive consumption costs the Scottish economy £3.6bn a year. Alcohol Focus Scotland estimate that in the first year alone, Scotland's minimum unit price will result in 60 fewer alcohol-related deaths and 1,600 fewer hospital admissions whilst, at the same time, having little effect on moderate drinkers.

In Canada, where minimum unit pricing has been in place in certain states for some time, the Institute for Alcohol Studies found that the introduction of a minimum unit price led to a 32% reduction in wholly alcohol-caused deaths in the state of British Columbia alone in the period 2002 to 2009.

Why is NIADA calling for the introduction of Minimum Unit Pricing in Northern Ireland?

Alcohol-related harm is estimated to cost Northern Ireland society approximately £900m each year across health, justice, policing and the economy. The annual cost of alcohol use to Northern Ireland's health and social care system alone is estimated to cost £250m a year.

170,000 adults in Northern Ireland drink at hazardous levels, with a further 47,000 adults drinking at harmful levels. One in six people who attend emergency departments have alcohol-related issues. At peak times, this often increases to eight in 10.

It is estimated that only 9% of the in-need population in Northern Ireland are treated for alcohol-related problems.

Of greatest concern to NIADA is the 310 people who died directly because of alcohol in 2015, which represent a 26% increase since 2005.

NIADA is calling on the introduction of a minimum unit price for alcohol to:

- Reduce alcohol-related deaths in Northern Ireland
- Reduce the burden of alcohol-related hospital admissions on the wider health and social care system
- Reduce the accessibility of problem cheap alcohol such as white ciders and low-quality beers and spirits
- Reduce alcohol-related crime in Northern Ireland

NIADA also recommends that the money generated from minimum unit pricing is used to fund appropriate alcohol treatment services and public health initiatives in Northern Ireland.

NIADA believes the introduction of a minimum unit price for alcohol in Northern Ireland is essential, as the statistics speak for themselves on the devastating impact alcohol can have on individuals, families and society. NIADA strongly urges the Department of Health to take immediate action to introduce minimum unit pricing in Northern Ireland.

With 20% of the local population who drink the most consuming 70% of all the alcohol purchased in Northern Ireland, NIADA does not believe the introduction of a minimum unit price would negatively affect moderate drinkers.

About NIADA

The Northern Ireland Alcohol & Drug Alliance (NIADA) is a group of voluntary and community sector organisations that provide support to those affected by alcohol and drug use and their families. Membership of NIADA currently consists of those organisations who hold regional Impact of Alcohol and Public Health Agency-awarded contracts for alcohol and drugs. Secretarial and policy development support is provided by NICVA.

Members: Addiction NI, ASCERT, Carlisle House, Contact, De Paul Ireland, Dunlewey, Extern, Northlands, Simon Community, Start360.

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