



DATE: 23 January 2018

RESPONSE OF: The Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland

RESPONSE TO: Improving Scotland's Health: Minimum Unit Pricing of Alcohol

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The Royal College of Psychiatrists is the leading medical authority on mental health in the United Kingdom and is the professional and educational organisation for doctors specialising in psychiatry.

We invite comments on the proposed minimum price of 50 pence per unit which is set out in the draft Scottish Statutory Instrument at Annex A.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland (RCPsychiS) is firmly supportive of the proposed minimum price of 50 pence per unit. Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) will reduce harm amongst the heaviest drinkers in Scotland, and will reduce the indirect effects that alcohol dependency has upon children, families and local communities.

The RCPsychiS advocated for MUP before the Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Act 2012 passed, and we are positive about the substantial public health benefits which will result from the implementation of this policy. A recent study by researchers at the University of Sheffield in 2016 has predicted a 50p minimum unit price is estimated to lead to 2,036 fewer deaths, and 38,859 fewer hospitalisations during the first 20 years of the policy's implementation in Scotland.¹

College members' own observations in clinical practice demonstrate the considerable harm caused by the availability of cheap alcohol. Alcohol misuse increases the likelihood of suicide and self-harm, and affects the judgement, mood and behaviour of heavy drinkers with alcohol dependence. Alcoholic liver disease is also the main cause of Chronic Liver Disease (CLD) morbidity. There has been a fourfold increase in CLD morbidity rates in Scotland since 1982/83.² Moreover, CLD amongst those with an alcohol dependency is significantly higher amongst the most deprived socio-economic groups in Scotland. In 2015, CLD stay rates in hospitals were five times higher in the most deprived decile compared to the least deprived decile.³

The impact of low cost alcohol does not just affect individual drinkers. By implementing MUP, the Government will mitigate the indirect effects of low cost alcohol on the health and well-being of children, relatives and local communities. It is hoped the domestic violence and child abuse which arises within families where an adult is dependent on alcohol can be reduced through MUP. A reduction in alcohol dependence amongst the heaviest drinkers will benefit the mental health of children.

There is a clear link between low cost alcohol and alcohol dependency. Minimum unit pricing will ultimately tackle heavy consumption of alcohol by individuals, and will not regressively target those on lowest income. The majority of alcohol products costing below 50p are consumed by those drinking more than 50 units per week.⁴ The range of alcohol products that are selectively targeted through MUP are purchased roughly equally across all income groups. The heaviest

¹ Colin Angus, John Holmes, Robert Pryce, Petra Meier and Alan Brennan (2016) *Model-Based Appraisal of the comparative impact of Minimum Unit Pricing and taxation policies in Scotland: An Adaptation of the Sheffield Alcohol Policy Model Version 3*, University of Sheffield.

² Information Services Division of NHS National Services Scotland. General/Acute Inpatient and Day Case – Scottish Morbidity Record (SMR01) dataset. Date extracted: [October 2016]

³ Ibid.

⁴ P. Meiner, Y. Meng, R. Purshouse *et al* (2010) *Model-Based Appraisal of Alcohol Minimum Pricing and Off-Licensed Trade Discount Bans in Scotland Using the Sheffield Alcohol Policy Model (v2): An Update Based on Newly Available Data*. University of Sheffield.

drinkers in Scotland are likely to substitute more expensive alcohol products with cheaper brands. Establishing a price floor targeted at the cheapest forms of alcohol will make it less likely heavy drinkers will drink as much as they currently do. Changing the price of more expensive forms of alcohol would not have an equivalent public health benefit.

Our members are confident MUP will result in a significant reduction in alcohol consumption amongst the heaviest drinkers who spend most of their disposable income on alcohol, as well as a subsequent reduction in alcohol related morbidity and mortality.

The College recommends the Scottish Government continue to explain and promote the public health benefits that will result from MUP.