

Prime Minister announces minimum pricing policy for England and Wales as new Alcohol Strategy launched

The Prime Minister is leading Government action on tackling drink-fuelled violence and the binge-drinking culture that fuels it. A new Alcohol Strategy sets out a radical approach to turn the tide against irresponsible drinking which costs the UK £21 billion a year.

It will help reverse a culture that led to almost one million alcohol-related violent crimes and 1.2 million alcohol-related hospital admissions last year alone. Strategy highlights include:

- a minimum unit price for alcohol
- banning the sale of multi-buy discount deals
- zero tolerance of drunken behaviour in A&E departments
- a late night levy to get pubs and clubs helping to pay for policing and
- improved powers to stop serving alcohol to drunks

The Prime Minister said:

“Binge drinking isn’t some fringe issue, it accounts for half of all alcohol consumed in this country. The crime and violence it causes drains resources in our hospitals, generates mayhem on our streets and spreads fear in our communities.

“My message is simple. We can’t go on like this. We have to tackle the scourge of violence caused by binge drinking. And we have to do it now.

“So we’re going to attack it from every angle. More powers for pubs to stop serving alcohol to people who are already drunk. More powers for hospitals not just to tackle the drunks turning up in A&E – but also the problem clubs that send them there night after night. And a real effort to get to grips with the root cause of the problem. And that means coming down hard on cheap alcohol.

“When beer is cheaper than water, it’s just too easy for people to get drunk on cheap alcohol at home before they even set foot in the pub. So we are going to introduce a new minimum unit price - so for the first time it will be illegal for shops to sell alcohol for less than this set price per unit. We’re consulting on the actual price, but if it is 40p that could mean 50,000 fewer crimes each year and 900 fewer alcohol related deaths per year by the end of the decade.

“This isn’t about stopping responsible drinking, adding burdens on business or some new kind of stealth tax - it’s about fast immediate action where universal change is needed.

“And let’s be clear. This will not hurt pubs. A pint is two units. If the minimum price is 40p a unit, it won’t affect the price of a pint. In fact, pubs may benefit by making the cheap alternatives in supermarkets more expensive.

“Of course, I know this won’t be universally popular. But the responsibility of being in government isn’t always about doing the popular thing. It’s about doing the right thing.

“Binge drinking is a serious problem. And I make no excuses for clamping down on it.”

The *Government Alcohol Strategy: Choice, Challenge and Responsibility* sets out a plan to reduce binge-drinking in a bid to drive down crime and tackle health issues that for too long have gone hand-in-hand with drinking to excess.

This is NOT about stopping sensible, responsible drinking or penalising pubs. A minimum unit price will not affect the price of a pint in the local. In fact, pubs may benefit from making cheap alternatives in supermarkets more expensive.

A minimum unit price for alcohol will be introduced, meaning that, for the first time, alcohol will not be allowed to be sold below a fixed price per unit. This will put an end to cheap white ciders, spirits and super-strength lagers.

The Government will consult on the level of the minimum unit price, but expects it to be around 40p per unit. This will end the scandal of beer that is cheaper than water, and will tackle ‘pre-loading’ - drinking cheap alcohol at home before heading to the pub or nightclub. We will consult on this over the summer with a view to introducing legislation as soon as possible.

We will also consult on stopping multi-buy promotions like *buy one, get one free* promotions where consumers are encouraged to buy more than they want, while keeping good value for customers like half-price deals.

The strategy is designed to take fast action where immediate and universal change is needed and is not a stealth tax, a regulatory burden on businesses, or a bid to end responsible drinking.

Chief Constable Jon Stoddart, Association of Chief Police Officers lead on alcohol, said:

“Week in week out in town centres across the country the police have to deal with the consequences of cheap alcohol and irresponsible drinking.

“The growing trend for ‘pre-loading’ means that young people are often drunk before they even enter a bar. By the time they hit the streets at closing they are more likely to get involved in crime and disorder or injure themselves or others.

“I welcome the government’s new approach that will help reduce the availability of cheap alcohol, give communities a greater say over licensing in their area and reduce pressure on the police.”



Professor Sir Ian Gilmore, of the Royal College of Physicians and the Alcohol Health Alliance, said:

"Health care workers who struggle every day to cope with the impact of our nation's unhealthy drinking will welcome tough new policies in areas such as price and licensing that are based on evidence and should bring about real benefits."

Eric Appleby, Chief Executive of Alcohol Concern, said:

"This is a victory for common sense. We cannot carry on with a situation where it's cheaper to buy cans of lager than a can of coke. We fully support the Government in taking action to clamp down on booze at pocket money prices and protect the health of our children and young people.

"All the research shows there is a link between price and consumption and we know that lives can be saved if a minimum price is introduced."



MYTH BUSTING

MYTH: Proposals are going to hit consumers in the pocket during difficult times and punish responsible drinkers

FACT: 80% of alcohol purchases are made by 30% of the population, and this group are the main beneficiaries of discounted alcohol. The cost of a 40p minimum unit price would be:

- for the average drinker = £21-£23 a year
- for moderate drinkers (drinking within recommended limits of up to 21 units a week for men and 14 units for women) = £5-£6 a year
- for harmful drinkers (drinking far above the recommended limit – more than 50 units a week for men and 35 for women) = £105-£135 a year

MYTH: This is just another duty increase

FACT: No it's not, a duty increase hits all alcohol for everyone; a minimum unit price hits cheap, harmful alcohol. To get the same positive effect on consumption, health and crime as a 40p MUP, we would have had to raise duty by RPI+9%.

MYTH: This is another attack on the poor

FACT: People on low income are the least likely to drink alcohol at all - at the moment, whenever a supermarket 'loss-leads' on alcohol, they are subsidizing heavy drinkers. Independent research by the IFS shows that cheap alcohol is bought by all income groups. The factor that most determines whether you are likely to buy really cheap alcohol is not your income, but how much you

drink - the heaviest drinkers (and those who binge) are particularly likely to buy cheap alcohol, which is why we are targeting it.

MYTH: The Government is going to make money out of this – it's just another tax

FACT: The Government will not make anything out of this. Unlike in Scotland, we are not planning to link this to a supermarket tax. Instead, we expect supermarkets to put any extra profits they make towards lowering the price of other goods. Studies have shown that deep discounting on alcohol benefits the heaviest drinkers, and costs the rest of us money - so ending the 'loss leaders' on alcohol, and instead discounting other products, will make the average shopping basket cheaper - which we think is the right thing in tough times.

MYTH: A minimum unit price of 40p won't have that much of an impact on reducing crime and health-related issues

FACT: There will be 170 fewer alcohol-related deaths in the first year, rising to 900 a year after ten years (7.7% fewer alcohol related deaths). There will be 50,600 fewer crimes a year; including 12,900 violent crimes. More than £80m will be saved in health and crime costs in the first year, rising to over £140m in the tenth year.

Harms impact	Year 1		Year 10	
	Absolute	% change	Absolute	% change
Alcohol-related deaths	-170	3.8%	-900	7.7%
Admissions	-7,000	2.8%	-30,200	3.6%
Health care costs	-£30,000,000	2.6%	-93,400,000	3.0%
Crimes	-50,600	1.7%	-50,600	1.7%
Violent crimes	-12,900	1.8%	-12,900	1.8%
Crime costs	-£53,700,000	1.7%	-53,700,000	1.7%
Violent crime costs	-£36,800,000	1.8%	-36,800,000	1.8%
% Change in consumption	-2.6%			

(Source: Government modelling)

MYTH: This is another example of the Nanny State as you tell people what to drink and business what to charge

FACT: People who drink sensibly will feel very little impact from these proposals. In particular, we want to support local pubs - where people drink sensibly and enjoy themselves - and reverse the shift towards 'pre-loading' on cheap alcohol at home - which we know leads to more violence. We are working in partnership with businesses: it is essential that we tackle price. We can't do that through voluntary agreements because it's illegal for the supermarkets to make agreements on pricing together. So to tackle cheap alcohol, Government has to take action.

MYTH: This is illegal

FACT: It isn't illegal. We believe coming down hard on cheap alcohol and its abuse is the right thing to do. International evidence shows that the price of alcohol is closely linked to how much is consumed, and we don't believe we can tackle Britain's relationship with drink without doing something about excessively cheap alcohol. We make no excuses for clamping down on excessive drinking and drunken behaviour.

MYTH: Alcohol consumption is going down, why are you doing this?

FACT: Alcohol consumption in general might be going down, but binge-drinking isn't – among women it has been rising. We know binge-drinking results in crime, anti-social behaviour and visits to A&E at a cost of £21billion a year. Around 50% of all alcohol consumed is drunk during binge sessions - this isn't a marginal problem.

MYTH: Banning multi-buy offers would mean no more good deals on booze

FACT: The Scots have had a ban on multi-buy offers since October 2011 and it doesn't mean you can't get good deals - a ban on multi-buys means that instead of '2 for 1' you offer 'half price'. This is actually better value for the customer because you can get the deal without buying two items. We don't want to stop people getting good deals - but we do want to stop shops 'pushing' people to buy more alcohol than they want.

STATISTICS

In 2010 more than £42billion was spent on alcohol in England and Wales alone. Alcohol has been so heavily discounted that it is now possible to buy a can of lager for a little as 20p and a two litre bottle of cider for £1.69.

We estimate that, in a community of 100,000 people, each year:

- 2,000 people will be admitted to hospital with an alcohol-related condition
- 1,000 people will be a victim of alcohol-related crime
- More than 3,000 will show some signs of alcohol dependence and
- More than 13,000 people will binge drink.

In a recent study, 66 per cent of 17-30 year-olds arrested claimed to have 'pre-loaded' before a night out, with pre-loaders two and half times more likely to be involved in violence than other drinkers.

CONTACTS

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