

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol ar Isafbris Uned am Alcohol yng Nghymru](#)

This response was submitted to the [Health and Social Care Committee](#) consultation on [Minimum unit pricing for alcohol in Wales](#)

MUP10 : Ymateb gan: Cancer Research UK | Response from: Cancer Research UK



The Senedd Health and Social Care Committee inquiry into minimum unit pricing (MUP) for alcohol in Wales

Cancer Research UK (CRUK) response, April 2025

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About CRUK

CRUK is the world's leading cancer charity dedicated to saving and improving lives through research. We fund research into the prevention, detection and treatment of more than 200 types of cancer through the work of over 4,000 scientists, doctors and nurses. In the last 50 years, we've helped double cancer survival in the UK and our research has played a role in around half of the world's essential cancer drugs. Our vision is a world where everybody lives longer, better lives, free from the fear of cancer.

A substantial proportion of cancers in the UK are preventable. Preventing more cancer cases would save lives, boost productivity and reduce pressures on health services, which is why reducing the number of alcohol-attributable cancers in the UK is a key priority for CRUK. CRUK funds and is a member of Alcohol Health Alliance, an alliance of more than 60 non-government organisations dedicated to promoting evidence-based policies to reduce the harm caused by alcohol.

To this end, CRUK welcomes the opportunity to engage with the Senedd's Health and Social Care inquiry into the future of Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) in Wales, and have framed our response as much as possible around the questions raised by the Committee for this consultation.

Cancer Research UK is a registered charity England and Wales (1089464), Scotland (SC041666), the Isle of Man (1103) and Jersey (247).

Alcohol and Cancer

Alcohol is known to cause at least seven different types of cancer, including two of the most common cancers, breast and bowel.^{1,2} The more a person drinks the greater their risk of cancer: whatever a person's drinking habits, cutting down will reduce the risk of cancer.³ Therefore, reducing the number of people who drink at harmful levels is important for reducing the number of preventable cancers throughout the UK, including Wales.

- Despite consuming lower levels of alcohol, people from more deprived backgrounds experience greater alcohol harm.⁴
- Each year in Wales, around 52,000 hospitalisations are due to alcohol, with a strong deprivation gradient evident.⁵

- It is estimated that there are around 680 alcohol-related deaths and around 560 alcohol-specific deaths registered in Wales each year, with the most deprived areas experiencing almost double the rates of alcohol-attributable mortality compared to the least deprived.⁶
- Men account for around two thirds of alcohol-specific deaths.⁷

These statistics demonstrate the importance of reducing alcohol-harm in Wales. Beyond heightened cancer risk, the preventable harms from alcohol also increase pressures on the NHS, and contribute to widening health inequalities.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recognises MUP as one of the most effective and cost-effective alcohol control measures⁸ across the European region, with evaluations in Scotland demonstrating a significant reduction in alcohol-specific deaths, and initial exploratory research showing a possible impact on reducing some health inequalities.⁹

CRUK supports the continued implementation of MUP in Wales and agree that the 50p MUP should be reviewed. Following Scotland's lead, we suggest MUP is uprated in line with inflation to 65p. An automatic price review mechanism should be included in the legislation. But this must be as part of a wider package of measures to reduce alcohol harm implemented by the Welsh Government.

Impact of MUP in Wales

MUP and alcohol-harm: MUP has met the aims set out by the Welsh Government

CRUK supports effective, evidence-based policies that reduce the levels of alcohol harm – and therefore alcohol-related cancers – in the UK.

There is a wealth of evidence demonstrating that the price and affordability of alcohol impacts levels of consumption in the population.¹⁰

MUP has been successful in meeting the aims set out by the Welsh Government of 'increasing the cost of cheap, high-strength alcohol'.¹¹ MUP sets a level below which a fixed volume of alcohol cannot be sold. In Wales this has been 50p per unit. This means that MUP will always be higher for stronger alcoholic drinks compared to drinks that are lower in alcohol. As such, MUP targets cheaper and higher-strength alcohol,^{12,13} which across all income groups is most often purchased by people who drink the most heavily.¹⁴

Evaluations of MUP in Scotland and Wales demonstrate the broadly positive impacts of MUP. Published in January 2025, the final evaluation of MUP in Wales highlights "clear observable" impacts of MUP, notably on the price and availability of products (such as strong, white ciders), and a statistically significant reduction on the number of alcohol units purchased by households.¹⁵ Crucially, evidence notes that the impact of MUP in Scotland and Wales is largely restricted to households purchasing the greatest amounts

of alcohol, and is not associated with increased expenditure for households outside of this.¹⁶

Although the Welsh evaluation did not examine the impact of MUP on key health outcomes, Public Health Scotland's evaluation of MUP in Scotland notes a 13.4% reduction in alcohol-specific deaths over a two-and-a-half-year period compared to England,¹⁷ highlighting the long-term value of MUP for reducing alcohol-harms, and relieving pressures on the health system. This is likely an underrepresentation of the positive effects of MUP as it does not capture the decrease in 'alcohol-related' deaths, such as cardiovascular disease and cancer. This risk of cancer-related harm from alcohol also accumulates over time and is unlikely to be captured in data measuring changes since 2020.

We also recognise that evaluating the impact of MUP in Wales is complicated by the effects of COVID-19, which saw increased rates of alcohol-consumption and alcohol harm, particularly amongst those who already drank the most.^{18,19} However, whilst rates of alcohol consumption increased overall across the UK, comparative research shows around a fifth (18–21%) reduction in the relative amount of alcohol bought in Wales compared to England during the pandemic, with post-pandemic rates of alcohol-consumption declining more rapidly in Wales compared to England.²⁰

Alcohol specific-deaths rose 52% between 2019 and 2023.²¹ The reasons are complex, and likely linked to the effects of increased alcohol consumption during the pandemic, and a complex interplay between alcohol-harms, deprivation and gender outlined in the section 'Alcohol and Cancer'. This highlights the need to ensure MUP is not treated as a silver bullet solution, and is part of a wider, comprehensive set of policy interventions.

MUP has the greatest impact on reducing alcohol-consumption in high-risk drinkers

MUP targets stronger, cheaper alcohol, which is primarily consumed by those who drink the most.^{22,23} Alcohol Change UK's submission outlines the biggest change resulting from MUP, notably in the price, presence and size of the cheapest, strongest ciders. Alcohol Change UK note that across Wales, 2 and 3 litre bottles of 'white cider' have been replaced by 500 ml cans, a significant harm reduction measure for increasing the number of 'drinking increments' (stages in the drinking process).

MUP therefore has the potential to have the greatest impact on reducing alcohol harm amongst the heaviest, and most high-risk drinkers.^{24,25} The more a person drinks, the greater their risk of cancer,²⁶ so this reduction in overall alcohol consumption could reduce the number of avoidable cancers in Wales.

Impact of MUP on low-income households

On average, despite lower levels of alcohol consumption, people from deprived backgrounds experience greater harms from alcohol,²⁷ so it follows that reductions in alcohol consumption in people from low-income households are likely to drive greater health gains than equivalent reductions amongst the wider population.

The interaction between alcohol and the wider determinants of health is complex, and whilst MUP is a crucial intervention for reducing alcohol-harm, we caution against treating it as a stand-alone solution for reducing alcohol-related health inequalities, and instead is part of a wider, comprehensive set of policy interventions.

There is some evidence from Scotland that MUP could have a positive impact on reducing alcohol harm, with estimated reductions in alcohol-specific deaths seen for both males and females, and those living in Scotland's most deprived areas, compared to expected levels had the legislation not been implemented.²⁸

The independent evaluation of MUP in Wales noted an increased financial strain on low-income people who were heavy drinkers.²⁹ However, we underscore the evaluators' comments that this did not begin with the introduction of MUP.³⁰ The solution for supporting low-income households (particularly those who are heavy drinkers) is not cheaper alcohol, but instead comprehensively and addressing alcohol-harm through a suite of measures.

MUP levels the playing field between businesses

The evaluation of MUP in Wales demonstrates that MUP is well-embedded within the everyday running of businesses, with good overall compliance to and understanding of the policy amongst retailers, and no significant impacts on cross-border shopping.³¹

It is unlikely that the introduction of MUP increased the price of alcohol in on-trade establishments (such as bars, restaurants or pubs), given that many already sold alcohol above 50p per unit – the average pint of a beer in a UK pub is closer to £5 (£2 per unit)³² Instead, the introduction of MUP in Wales has been positively perceived to level the playing field between off-trade retailers and on-trade venues.³³

The future of MUP

CRUK strongly support the proposed continuation of MUP in Wales. Despite the impact of COVID-19, the overall impact of MUP is positive. Removing MUP would present a rolling-back of an effective, cost-effective and evidence-based public health measure to reduce alcohol harm, especially amongst people who drink the most.

To be an effective policy, the price per unit must be proportionate. We recognise that the effect of MUP has been eroded by inflation and it is now less effective at reducing alcohol harms than when it was first introduced. To improve the long-term impact of MUP, we

recommend that MUP is uprated to 65p per unit, with an automatic price review mechanism included in the legislation.

It is also crucial that MUP is not treated as the only solution to reducing alcohol harm in Wales. **MUP must be continued as part of a comprehensive package of measures to reduce the availability, affordability and marketing of alcohol.**

We also share Alcohol Health Alliance's and Alcohol Change UK's concerns that allowing the current legislation to lapse could make it harder to reinstate in the future, as the Wales Act 2017 designates the sale and supply of alcohol as a matter for Westminster.³⁴

Requesting permission from the UK Government to introduce the legislation again would be present additional barriers to reducing alcohol harm in Wales, and would be an unnecessary step back for devolution given that MUP is already in existence.

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