

**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](#)**

**MUP12: Ymateb gan: Coleg Nyrdd Brenhinol Cymru | Response from: Royal College of Nursing Wales**

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## **Response from the Royal College of Nursing Wales to the Health and Social Care Committee inquiry into *Minimum unit pricing for alcohol in Wales***

### **1. Background**

The Royal College of Nursing Wales is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Health and Social Care Committee inquiry into *Minimum unit pricing for alcohol in Wales*.

I. The Royal College of Nursing Wales unequivocally supported introducing a Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) policy in Wales, both prior to and during the development of the Bill that eventually became the Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Act 2018.<sup>1</sup> RCN Wales remains unequivocally supportive of the continuation of the MUP policy.

II. Nurses in Wales are faced and challenged with the consequences of alcohol misuse every day. These range from dealing with violent and aggressive patients in accident and emergency departments (A&E) to caring for people suffering from long term poor health as a result of sustained alcohol abuse. Nurses throughout Wales have a role and commitment to assist the people of Wales by supporting the population to make healthier choices.

III. The RCN's prevention work is underpinned by the principle that we should empower individuals with the appropriate information they will need to understand the impact of alcohol misuse in order for them to make healthier lifestyle choices. The RCN, however, also believes that more can be done to change the wider environment so that the healthier choice is the easy choice. Sometimes, this may require regulation by government, and on the subject of alcohol misuse the RCN's stated position is that this is one area that requires urgent government intervention. For example, as well as supporting MUP in Wales, RCN Wales believes that:

- (i) legislation is needed to prevent the alcohol industry from undertaking promotional activities which encourage excessive consumption or target children.
- (ii) legislation is needed for the mandatory labelling of all alcohol drinks with unit and health information in a consistent format.

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<sup>1</sup> [MPA 29 Royal College of Nursing.pdf](#)

(iii) a drink drive limit of 50mg per 100 millilitres of blood alcohol content should be introduced.

IV. However, while very supportive of MUP, RCN Wales made clear at the time that MUP by itself does not go far enough in tackling the harms of alcohol and therefore recommended that governments implement other measures alongside MUP; these measures remain relevant at the time of writing (see Recommendations section).

V. The Committee may want to be aware of the following statement made by the Alcohol Health Alliance UK, of which the Royal College of Nursing was a signatory:

“We unequivocally endorse the Welsh government’s adoption of a minimum unit price for alcohol. Minimum unit pricing is a highly effective tool to reduce the number of deaths related to alcohol, crime and workplace absence. The Welsh government continues to demonstrate its firm commitment to tackle the problem of cheap alcohol and the devastating effect this has on our communities, especially its most vulnerable members.

“This decisive action will not impact prices in pubs or bars but target pocket-money-priced alcohol. It is simply unacceptable that three litres of white cider, containing the equivalent alcohol of 22 shots of vodka, can be bought for just £3.49.

“With alcohol misuse costing £21bn-£52bn per year, the UK government must now follow Wales and Scotland by implementing a policy that will save lives, relieve pressure on our NHS and fulfil its commitment to even out life chances.”<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Public understanding of MUP

VI. Results from the final wave (January 2025) of a longitudinal study assessing the impact of the MUP policy on the wider population of drinkers in Wales revealed that:

*“...the majority of drinkers were aware of MPA (Minimum Pricing for Alcohol) and had learned about it through a variety of sources, including their jobs or studies, the television or radio (on the news), social media, or through word of mouth. However, a sizeable minority of drinkers had not heard of MPA, which suggests either publicity about MPA has not been as extensive as it could have been, or that some people had simply not noticed it. Those who were aware of MPA varied in terms of their level of understanding, with some having only a vague understanding, while others had more comprehensive knowledge.”<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> [MPA 29 Royal College of Nursing.pdf](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Assessing the Impact of Minimum Pricing for Alcohol on the Wider Population of Drinkers: Final Report](#)

VII. Public understanding of the MUP policy in Wales has been “lowest among higher risk drinkers”.<sup>4</sup>

VIII. The Welsh Government has therefore had mixed success in communicating the purpose of the legislation to the general public.

IX. RCN Wales believes that the Welsh Government should improve public awareness of the legislation.

### **3. Impact of MUP**

X. ONS statistics show that alcohol-related deaths significantly increased in Wales each since the MUP came into force in 2020<sup>5</sup>. However, researchers note that this is likely the result of factors such as “COVID-19, cost of living, poverty and socio-economic considerations, and potential reductions in, or access to, service provision” rather than as a result of MUP.<sup>6</sup>

XI. Similar increases in alcohol-related deaths for the same period were also recorded in England, where a MUP policy has not been adopted.<sup>7</sup>

XII. Regarding the success of MUP in Wales, the Welsh Government should analyse the evidence over a prolonged period. At the time of writing, the policy has only been in place for five years; it is unlikely that we would be able to see the full benefits of the policy at this point. The Welsh Government should therefore pay attention to international examples and long-term projections.

XIII. Long-term projections paint MUP in a positive light. For example, according to a Welsh Government-commissioned report by the University of Sheffield (2018), “For a 50p MUP alcohol consumption is estimated to fall by 3.6% and there would be an estimated 66 fewer alcohol-attributable deaths per year and 1,281 fewer alcohol-attributable hospital admissions [in Wales] after 20 years when the policy is at full effect.”<sup>8</sup>

XIV. International examples show the benefits of introducing MUP for alcohol. Public Health Scotland, for example, reported that there is “strong evidence” that MUP has: “reduced deaths directly caused by alcohol consumption (wholly attributable) in

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<sup>4</sup> [\\*Final report - Review of the introduction of Minimum Pricing for Alcohol in Wales](#), p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> [Alcohol-specific deaths in the UK - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>6</sup> [\\*Final report - Review of the introduction of Minimum Pricing for Alcohol in Wales](#), p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> [\\*Final report - Review of the introduction of Minimum Pricing for Alcohol in Wales](#), p. 30.

<sup>8</sup> [Model-based appraisal of the comparative impact of Minimum Unit Pricing and taxation policies in Wales: Final report](#) p. 79.

Scotland compared to what would have happened in the absence of MUP” and “reduced wholly attributable hospital admissions due to chronic causes”.<sup>9</sup>

XV. In Canada, some form of minimum alcohol prices has been in place for decades. This has resulted in “reductions in alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harms, including deaths”.<sup>10</sup>

XVI. In Ireland, MUP is part of a wider package of policies all aimed at reducing the harm that is caused by alcohol. Complementary policies include “restricting alcohol advertising, addition of warning labels to alcohol products, and reducing the visibility of alcohol products in retail outlets”.<sup>11</sup>

XVII. While RCN Wales supports the continuation of a MUP policy in Wales, we also believe that this policy is not sufficient in itself to tackle the harm that is caused by alcohol.

XVIII. Registered nurses, both in primary and secondary care, play a crucial role in providing care and treatment for individuals who have been injured or otherwise adversely affected by alcohol misuse. Clinical nurse specialists in addiction, consultant nurses in substance misuse, mental health nurses and community nurses are just some examples of the types of nurses that NHS Wales needs to employ if we are to tackle the harm caused by alcohol misuse. (More information regarding the importance of the nursing workforce in delivering key health services can be found in RCN Wales’s Nursing in Numbers 2024 report).<sup>12</sup>

#### **4. Future of MUP in Wales**

XIX. The Royal College of Nursing Wales believes that minimum unit pricing should continue in Wales. Evidence points to the effectiveness of the current policy in reducing alcohol harm. Modelling undertaken by SARG in 2018, suggested that 50p MUP is “estimated to lead to 66 or 8.5% fewer alcohol-attributable deaths per year and 1,281 or 3.6% fewer alcohol-attributable hospital admissions per year” in Wales.

XX. Unless the Welsh Government decides to extend the MUP policy in Wales, the sunset clause of the Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Act 2018 will take effect and the MUP policy will come to an end. If this were to take place, the Welsh

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<sup>9</sup> [Evaluating the impact of minimum unit pricing for alcohol in Scotland: Final report](#) pp. 11-12.

<sup>10</sup> [Final report - Review of the introduction of Minimum Pricing for Alcohol in Wales](#), p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> [The implementation of a public health alcohol policy in Ireland | Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine | Cambridge Core](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Nursing in Numbers 2024 | Publications | Royal College of Nursing](#)

Government and Senedd would risk permanently losing powers over MUP policy, given the Wales Act 2017.<sup>13</sup>

XXI. Independent research commissioned by the Welsh Government concluded that “The relatively limited effects, both positive and negative, reflect the 50ppu price level and it being an initially cautious one. While it was the price level deliberately chosen for implementation, given it sits in an economic environment that has rapidly changed, there are strong arguments that it now needs to be updated...Increasing the price to, for example, 65ppu [price per unit] will only mean that alcohol returns to the same affordability of 2018, let alone the initial modelling periods of 2009-10.”<sup>14</sup> The Royal College of Nursing Wales therefore believes that the current minimum unit price of 50ppu should be increased to at least 65ppu to take into account inflation and the cost of living.

## 5. Recommendations

RCN Wales calls on the Welsh Government to:

1. Ensure that Wales continues to have a minimum unit pricing policy in place.
2. Increase the minimum unit price to at least 65p.
3. Improve communication of MUP policy among the general public.
4. Work with the UK Government to ensure, where powers regarding alcohol are reserved to Westminster, that:
  - (i) Legislation is introduced to prevent the alcohol industry from undertaking promotional activities which encourage excessive consumption or target children.
  - (ii) Legislation is introduced for the mandatory labelling of all alcohol drinks with unit and health information in a consistent format.
  - (iii) A drink drive limit of 50mg per 100 millilitres of blood alcohol content is introduced
5. Increase support for those with alcohol dependence problems.
6. Invest in the nursing workforce and extend Section 25B of the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016 to mental health and community nursing.

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<sup>13</sup> [\\*Final report - Review of the introduction of Minimum Pricing for Alcohol in Wales](#), p. 17

<sup>14</sup> [\\*Final report - Review of the introduction of Minimum Pricing for Alcohol in Wales](#), p. 72.

7. Extend measures to tackle poverty and health inequalities. (Some examples of such measures are outlined in the RCN Wales response to the Health and Social Care Committee's 2024 inquiry into the *Prevention of ill-health – obesity*).<sup>15</sup>

### **Coleg Brenhinol Nyrssio Cymru – Royal College of Nursing Wales**

The RCN is the world's largest professional body and trade union for nursing staff, representing over half a million members, including nurses, midwives, health visitors and nursing students, with around 30,500 members in Wales. The majority of RCN members work in the NHS with around a quarter working in the independent sector. The RCN works locally, nationally and internationally to promote standards of care and the interests of patients and nurses, and of nursing as a profession. The RCN is a UK-wide organisation, with its own National Boards for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The RCN is a major contributor to nursing practice, standards of care, and public policy as it affects health and nursing. The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://business.senedd.wales/documents/s152466/OB40%20-%20Royal%20College%20of%20Nursing%20RCN%20Wales.pdf>