Cancer Research UK

Alcohol (Licensing, Public Health and Criminal Justice) (Scotland) Bill

Overview

Cancer Research UK recognises the serious harm caused by alcohol particularly its impact on health. Alcohol is a major risk factor for cancer and a major cause of health harms in the UK. Cancer Research UK supports measures to reduce alcohol harm. Reducing alcohol’s contribution to ill health requires an ambitious approach to cut total alcohol consumption among those drinking at harmful levels, and enable those that choose to drink to not exceed the low risk guidelines.

We welcome the Alcohol (Licensing, Public Health and Criminal Justice) (Scotland) Bill as part of a comprehensive approach to tackle alcohol harm in Scotland. In particular, we recognise the efforts in the bill to reduce alcohol marketing to children. The evidence of both alcohol marketing and the experience of tobacco control show that there is a strong case for comprehensive restrictions on alcohol advertising and sponsorship.

Alcohol and Cancer

- Drinking alcohol can be harmful to health and is associated with cancer, heart disease, stroke and liver disease.

- Alcohol has been identified by the World Health Organisation’s International Agency for Cancer Research as Group 1 which means there is sufficient evidence to show that it causes cancer in humans.

- Alcohol is associated with seven cancers (mouth, throat, food pipe, voice box, breast, bowel, and liver) and in the UK is linked to around 12,800 cancers a year.

There is no level of drinking which is free from the risk of cancer. As little as one standard drink a day (such as a standard 175ml glass of wine) can increase the risk of breast cancer among women. Reducing alcohol...
consumption is a necessary part of cancer prevention strategies. Cancer Research UK supports initiatives and measures to reduce alcohol consumption, particularly that which exceeds the NHS lower risk guidelines.\textsuperscript{v}

Current lower-risk guidelines for alcohol (which are under review) state that men should not regularly drink more than 3 to 4 units per day, and women should not regularly drink more than 2 to 3 units per day.\textsuperscript{vi} The UK Chief Medical Officer guidelines state no children under the age of 15 years should consume alcohol, and recommends that an alcohol-free childhood is the healthiest and best option.\textsuperscript{vii}

The Cost of Alcohol
Alcohol harms place a significant burden on the NHS and the economy:

- Estimates from the Scottish Government show that the cost to the NHS of alcohol misuse was around \textbf{£270m a year} and the cost to the economy was \textbf{£3.6bn a year} at 2007 prices.\textsuperscript{viii}
- Across the UK, it is estimated that alcohol costs the NHS £3.3bn a year and the cost of alcohol related cancers alone is \textbf{over £700m a year}.\textsuperscript{ix}

Drinking in Scotland
Alcohol consumption in the UK has increased since the 1980s. Despite some levelling off, harmful drinking in the UK remains a big problem.

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that in 2010 the average person over 15 in the UK drank \textbf{11.2 litres of pure alcohol a year}.\textsuperscript{x} This is equivalent to roughly \textbf{530 standard glasses of wine} or \textbf{490 pints of beer}\textsuperscript{xi} per person and is almost double the global average of 6.2 litres of pure alcohol per person. This figure also does not take account of the growing proportion of non-drinkers in the UK.
- In Scotland, alcohol consumption has increased over the last 20 years.\textsuperscript{xii} Despite, some levelling off and reductions in recent years, \textsuperscript{xiii} many people in Scotland continue to drink at hazardous and harmful levels.
- \textbf{40% of men and 31% of women exceed the NHS daily low risk guidelines} and 22% of men and 16% of women exceed the weekly low risk guidelines for drinking.\textsuperscript{xiv} Given under-reporting in these surveys, it is likely that the true figures are much higher.
- Similarly while alcohol consumption among young people has fallen, the levels remain concerning. \textbf{Almost one in five (19%) 15 year olds have reported drinking in the week} prior to being surveyed, and \textbf{only 30% have never had a proper alcoholic drink}.\textsuperscript{ xv}

A comprehensive alcohol strategy
No single measure can reduce excessive alcohol consumption; a comprehensive approach is needed. A comprehensive alcohol strategy should be based on the independent, evidence-based report \textit{Health First}.\textsuperscript{ xv} This
strategy, part-funded by CRUK and supported by over 70 organisations, identifies the key policies needed to reduce alcohol harm.

An alcohol strategy should also prioritise the WHO’s ‘best buy’ policies\textsuperscript{xvii} which are to:

- Raise taxes on alcohol
- Restrict access to alcohol
- Enforce bans on alcohol advertising

The evidence suggests that voluntary measures are not the most effective way to reduce alcohol harm.\textsuperscript{xviii} Regulatory measures can create an even playing field for businesses and have a greater impact on public health. The role of the alcohol industry should be limited to implementation of alcohol policies; they should not be involved in public health policymaking.

**Alcohol marketing**

Alcohol marketing has a particular impact on young people and their relationship with alcohol. A review of the evidence demonstrated that young people who are exposed to alcohol marketing are more likely to start drinking, and if already drinking, will drink more.\textsuperscript{xix} Tackling alcohol marketing is an important pillar of a comprehensive approach to alcohol harm reduction. It can help to ‘denormalise’ excessive alcohol consumption and may address the fact that attitudes towards getting drunk in Scotland have not changed greatly since 2004.\textsuperscript{xx}

Currently the Advertising Standards Agency rules are primarily intended to prevent marketing of alcohol that targets children. **However, alcohol advertising of any kind encourages young people to drink, not just that which targets young audiences.**\textsuperscript{xxi}

We welcome public health legislation on alcohol which is modelled on the French alcohol marketing law ‘Loi Evin’. This law provides a workable approach to regulating alcohol advertising by identifying in which media advertisements can be shown and regulating the content of such advertisements. Countries such as the Republic of Ireland are developing public health legislation on alcohol following a similar approach.

**The evidence suggests that partial bans have little effect on overall consumption of alcohol.**\textsuperscript{xxi} Therefore consideration should be given to whether the impact of new regulations would reduce total youth exposure to alcohol advertising or just displace this form of advertising.

There is some evidence to show that brands which are popular among underage drinkers are those which are most likely to be sponsors of sports, music, arts and entertainment.\textsuperscript{xxii} Young people often attend a range of sporting and cultural events not primarily aimed at them, such as Scottish Premier League football matches. This should be taken into account in developing the policy response to alcohol sponsorship.

**Cancer Research UK**
Cancer Research UK is the world’s largest independent cancer charity dedicated to saving lives through research. It supports research into all aspects of cancer and this is achieved through the work of over 4,000 scientists, doctors and nurses. In 2013/14, it spent £386 million on research in institutes, hospitals and universities across the UK – including a £35 million contribution made to the Francis Crick Institute. It receives no Government funding for its research.

2 IARC Monographs on the evaluation of carcinogenic risks to humans volume 96 alcohol. 2007 http://monographs.iarc.fr/ENG/Monographs/vol96/mono96.pdf
5 http://www.nhs.uk/change4life/Pages/alcohol-lower-risk-guidelines-units.aspx
11 Calculated on the basis of a pint of 4% abv beer and a 175ml glass of 12% abv wine
ALCOHOL CAN CAUSE 7 TYPES OF CANCER

Drinking less alcohol could prevent 12,800 cancer cases per year in the UK.

- Mouth and upper throat
- Larynx
- Oesophagus
- Breast in women
- Liver
- Bowel

Larger circles indicate cancers with more cases linked to alcohol in the UK.

4 WAYS ALCOHOL CAUSES CANCER
- Damages cells
- Increases damage from tobacco
- Affects hormones linked to breast cancer
- Breaks down into cancer-causing chemicals

Let's beat cancer sooner cruk.org