Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Bill

Quarriers

Thank you for giving Quarriers the opportunity to respond to the Health and Sport Committee’s call for evidence on this bill. Quarriers is a major Scottish charity providing practical care and support every day to thousands of people. Through more than 120 services for Adult Disability, Children and Families, Epilepsy and Young Adults in Scotland and a growing number of services in parts of England, we challenge inequality of opportunity and choice, to bring about positive change in people’s lives.

We broadly support the introduction of a minimum price for alcohol, to help reduce alcohol consumption in Scotland by harmful drinkers. However, it is important to recognise that this needs to be part of a range of different measures, to support this objective. Minimum pricing on its own will have a very limited impact on harmful alcohol consumption, and we would ask that the following are also considered.

Supporting families and communities

- There needs to be a more clearly defined link between the early years strategy, the parenting strategy and the alcohol strategy including building parenting skills pre-birth.
- The dangers of alcohol consumption linked to Foetal Alcohol Syndrome need to be explored as part of a wider education programme particularly with teenage young people.
- There needs to be greater recognition of the need for support for children affected by parental alcohol issues and/or children who may use alcohol themselves.
- There needs to be greater consideration of, and resources for, the intensive and specialist work required to support families with addiction issues or where early intervention may prevent escalation of difficulties.
- Partnership working is essential and there are some good examples of universal services and specialist agencies working closely to achieve positive outcomes for families. There is, however, a significant way to go to ensure that the required level of collaboration, which should work as a genuine partnership between public sector statutory health and social work services and voluntary sector specialist providers, is consistently implemented across Scotland.
- There also needs to be greater consideration given to the impact on children who live with a parent with both mental health and alcohol problems, the high risk of offending behaviour by those parents and consequential custodial sentences, and how these families can be supported.
**Diversionary activities**

We do feel that more consideration needs to be given to developing and supporting long-term, sustainable alternatives to young people’s recreational alcohol use. This needs to be a wider range than Friday evening football sessions, and should facilitate the inclusion of young people who are less enthusiastic about sports. The cost of participation in alternative activities should be given due consideration and be at an affordable level for young people. Costs should pitched to compete with a bottle of cheap alcohol which, starting at around £2, is often a less expensive alternative to a gym session or other pursuits.

**Information for parents**

Whilst we accept that clearer, unambiguous information needs to be developed for parents, it is also important to have a comprehensive strategy for informing children and young people directly, which could include the use of peer education and “live autopsy” type pictorial evidence of the dangers of alcohol misuse.

**Restrictions on alcohol advertising**

The association of alcohol with sports, particularly football teams in Glasgow, reinforces a positive image of alcohol. Many major brands of alcohol are already well-known to, and clearly recognised by, very young children as a result of sports sponsorship, particularly football teams, and it tends to be the brand name, rather than any responsible drinking message, that is recognised and remembered. So there is a dichotomy of alcohol education on the dangers of alcohol misuse alongside promotional messages seen on television and newspapers, on an almost daily basis, by a majority of the population as an entirely normal part of life, endorsed by the sports personalities associated with it.

**Improved support and treatment**

Whilst we support proposals for increased provision of support services for those with addiction issues, greater consideration needs to be given to the reasons why people use alcohol. For many, it is a coping mechanism, used to handle extreme stress resulting from trauma, especially young people who have been abused, who have mental health problems and/or have been in care. This is not recreational alcohol use, this is a survival technique and until significantly improved mental health services for children and young people are available, this destructive cycle of misuse is likely to continue. The vicious cycle of parental substance misuse creating vulnerable children who are themselves the next generation of parents with addictive behaviour requires long-term, sustainable solutions, not temporary interventions, the short-term nature of which have a diluted impact.
This all needs to be considered alongside the public health levy and the social responsibility levy, to form a comprehensive strategic approach to the reduction of alcohol misuse in Scotland.

I hope that the above is helpful but would be happy to provide further information if that were useful and to discuss further the work of Quarriers and the people we support.

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