

Clare Haughey MSP
 Convenor Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

05 September 2023

Dear Convenor,

PRE-BUDGET SCRUTINY 2024-25

I am writing to you as Chief Executive of the British Liver Trust in response to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee’s recent pre-budget scrutiny 2024-25¹.

While we welcome the planned budget increases of 4% per year in real terms for health and social care services over the next four years, prevention must be at the heart of government action to combat the rise in obesity and alcohol harm in Scotland which are exacerbating huge pressures and avoidable costs facing our NHS and vital public services.

Liver disease is almost entirely preventable (90%) but mortality rates have surged by 85% over the last 3 decades driven by an epidemic of alcohol misuse and population obesity².

Over 70% of liver disease deaths in Scotland are attributable to alcohol³. Alcohol costs the Scottish economy an estimated £10 billion each year, including £700 million in health and social care costs and £865 million in lost productivity⁴ – against a backdrop of a 25% increase in alcohol deaths (2019-22) and 40% drop in access to specialist alcohol treatment in Scotland over the last decade⁵.

Obesity is another major driver of liver disease. Obesity costs the Scottish economy up to £4.6 billion per year including up to £600 million in NHS costs⁶. Alarmingly, up to 4 in 10 obese children are estimated to have fatty liver disease – drastically increasing their risk of developing cardiovascular disease and a multitude of cancers later in life at huge cost to the NHS and workforce productivity⁷.

Our most disadvantaged communities are disproportionately impacted by both alcohol harm and obesity – key risk factors for liver disease – resulting in mortality rates for liver disease being almost 6 times higher in the most deprived versus the most affluent areas.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) has emphasised the need to “focus on efforts to boost skills, productivity and incomes to increase the amount raised per person from devolved taxes, as well as efforts to tackle ill health and other drivers of demand for public services to reduce spending⁸.”

We urge the Committee therefore to join our calls for greater investment in alcohol services and recovery support, alongside a renewed commitment to preventative policies recommended by the World Health Organization on pricing, availability and marketing of alcohol and unhealthy food and drinks.

We collaborate closely with the Alcohol Focus Scotland and have endorsed evidence they submitted to inform the Committee’s pre-budget scrutiny 2024-25. We urge the Committee to join

¹ <https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/committees/current-and-previous-committees/session-6-health-social-care-and-sport-committee/business-items/prebudget-scrutiny-202425>

² [Mortality - ScotPHO](#)

³ [Scottish-Policy-Report_British-Liver-Trust.pdf \(britishlivertrust.org.uk\)](#)

⁴ Bhattacharya, A. (2023). *Getting in the spirit? Alcohol and the Scottish Economy*. Social Market Foundation.

⁵ <https://www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk/news/decline-in-alcohol-treatment-in-scotland/>

⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/diet-healthy-weight-monitoring-report-2020/pages/2/>

⁷ <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng49/chapter/context>

⁸ Phillips, D. (2022). How could a falling population affect the Scottish Government’s funding? [Institute for Fiscal Studies](#).



calls for an alcohol harm prevention levy applied to retailers licensed to sell alcohol via a supplement on non-domestic business rates.

This fiscal lever will help to offset the significant costs to the public sector of dealing with the consequences of alcohol harm and allow for increased and urgently needed investment in recovery-oriented alcohol services.

The implementation of such a levy would also be in keeping with the Scottish Government's desire to use "all levers at the disposal of Scottish Government and public bodies in order to secure stable and proportionate funding to invest in and maintain public services"⁹.

With your support, we hope to turn the tide on the liver disease crisis, help save lives and reduce huge avoidable cost pressures facing our vital public services into the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pamela Healy".

Pamela Healy OBE
Chief Executive of the British Liver Trust

⁹ Scottish Government (2023). The Scottish Government's Medium-Term Financial Strategy.