

## Scottish Drugs Forum

### Response to Scottish Government Consultation on Minimum Unit Pricing of Alcohol – November 2023

Scottish Drugs Forum contacted its entire membership seeking opinion on this issue and responses to the questions set in the consultation. There was a clear consensus among the responses on the issues involved and that minimum unit pricing should continue. There was less opinion expressed regarding the level of unit price. This was interpreted as a lack of expertise and insight into alcohol markets and the impact on consumption of different levels for MUP. It was decided not to respond to the question on the level of MUP.

1. *Do you think Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) should continue?*

Yes

2. *If MUP continues, do you agree with the proposed Minimum Unit Price of 65 pence?*

No response

3. *We invite comments on the Scottish Ministers' proposal to continue MUP, and the proposed Minimum Unit Price of 65 pence.*

Scottish Drugs Forum promotes evidence-based policy and practice. There is evidence that a minimum unit price (MUP) for alcohol has achieved reduced alcohol-related harm across the population in Scotland. Health inequalities that reflect wealth and income inequalities are prevalent in Scotland and a key driver of Scotland's poor health outcomes. MUP has had a positive impact in reducing health inequalities as it has reduced alcohol consumption most in the poorest communities in Scotland. These are the two significant arguments for the retention of MUP.

Only by adopting all effective measures can we fully address the range of harms that cause and are caused by substance use. Minimum unit pricing makes a contribution to reducing alcohol-related harm but should be set in the context of a full range of necessary evidence-based effective measures. In terms of preventing harms for individuals, these include education and early interventions for families and others experiencing difficulties. For people experiencing alcohol-related harms, effective measures include support and treatment. We should be making support and treatment services more accessible and acceptable to people with an alcohol problem.

MUP is not a measure that can address the issues that arise for people involved in polysubstance use including alcohol. Education, early intervention and support is required. Treatment may also be required. This is not an argument against the continuation of MUP but for the need for other policy and service provision.

As regards the level of the unit price, Scottish Drugs Forum cannot make a specific recommendation on this, but it seems rational that in the context of inflation and average income growth the rate of the minimum unit price should be increased to ensure the policy remains effective in reducing harms across the population. The Scottish Government should follow the evidence and expert advice on the level to which it should be raised. The only consideration should be the maintenance of the positive outcomes achieved in terms of reducing overall harms.