



press release

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Our Life welcomes Health Select Committee's call for radical overhaul of alcohol policy

North West wellbeing and health campaign Our Life has welcomed calls by the House of Commons Health Select Committee for a complete overhaul of the government's alcohol policy and the introduction of a minimum price for alcohol in an attempt to reduce drink-related deaths, injuries and accidents.

The all-party committee of MPs charged with looking at the scale of ill-health related to alcohol misuse, the consequences for the NHS and the effectiveness of government policy, published its long awaited alcohol report today (8 January 2010) warning that "...the drinks industry and supermarkets hold more power over government alcohol policies than expert health professionals."

Our Life chief executive Dr Alison Giles said: "Our Life has long been campaigning for firmer action to address alcohol-related harm and we fully support the committee's calls for the introduction of minimum pricing, tighter and totally independent regulation of alcohol promotion, vastly improved alcohol treatment services, better early detection and intervention, a mandatory labelling scheme for alcoholic drinks, and much better use of expert advice."

The committee's conclusions backed up Our Life's submission to the committee last year into how alcohol is promoted and sold by supermarkets in the North West. "We welcome the report's recommendation of introducing a minimum

price of 40p a unit of alcohol. It is widely accepted that such a step would save lives and we are delighted that the select committee has recognised this fact," said Dr Giles. "We are also pleased to see that MPs on the committee have dispelled the myth that a rise in prices would unfairly affect the majority of moderate drinkers."

"The Health Select Committee report highlights once and for all to the government that the consequences of rising rates of alcohol consumption and the immense strain and cost of alcohol abuse on health services can no longer be ignored," Dr Giles said. "The NHS is having to react to an alcohol misuse problem that is being fuelled by the actions of alcohol retailers and MPs are absolutely right to subject the industry to greater scrutiny," said Dr Giles.

Our Life is now urging the government to acknowledge the Health Select Committee's recommendations by reforming licensing to take into account public health, better regulating of supermarket alcohol sales and introducing a minimum price for alcohol.

"Thousands of people across the North West have made it clear they want to see effective measures to address alcohol harm and a strong code of practice for alcohol retailers as soon as possible. The real issue here is the environment in which such harms are occurring and specifically the super-cheap, pocket-money prices at which alcohol is being sold by the supermarkets," said Dr Giles.

"The government needs to take responsibility now, not delay any possible action until after a general election and not listen to the vested interests of the alcohol retailers who would rather the government did nothing," Dr Giles concluded.

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For further information contact Andy Walker, Head of Corporate Affairs, Our Life, on 0161 237 2031 or 07818 568573 or email andy.walker@ourlife.org.uk

Notes to Editors:

1. Our Life is a campaigning organisation working with individuals and organisations who want to achieve the real and lasting changes that will make the North West a healthier place to live.
2. Established as a social enterprise, Our Life offers creative ways for the NHS, local government, the public, business and voluntary organisations to work in partnership to make sure that the North West becomes one of the healthiest regions in the country.
3. The North West has one the worst drinking levels in the country for people drinking at hazardous or harmful levels (1.33 million adults). In the North West, one person is admitted to hospital every seven minutes for an alcohol-related condition. The financial cost of alcohol-related harm to NHS North West is estimated to be in excess of £400 million per year.
4. More than 73,000 recorded crimes across the North West last year were related to alcohol – of these 50,000 were violent offences. The estimated costs of alcohol-related and alcohol specific crime in England is £12 billion.
5. The North West has almost seven million inhabitants and 230,000 companies. Its economy is worth £106 billion. Despite this, the North West has one of the worst health records in the country. A boy born in the region might expect to live ten years younger than one born in the South East of the country.