

# Press Release



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## **Supermarket cheap booze offers fuelling surge in North West alcohol harm, say health campaigners**

A rising tide of super-cheap supermarket alcohol deals is contributing to the big increase in alcohol-related harm in the North West, according to a mystery shopper survey conducted by North West wellbeing and health campaigners, Our Life.

In visits to supermarkets in six towns and cities in all five regions of the North West, Our Life found that ultra-cheap offers were widespread, with alcohol being promoted and sold at pocket-money prices. Our Life's head of campaigns and advocacy Calum Irving said: "The results of our survey are staggering. Across the North West alcohol is being sold and promoted irresponsibly by supermarkets and what's more, we can prove it. When you can buy 18 bottles of Becks lager for £5 from Tesco or a two-litre bottle of cider from Sainsbury's for £1.21, or just 14p per unit, you have to wonder whether the supermarkets aren't using cheap alcohol as a deliberate promotional tool to attract customers," Irving asked.

According to Our Life, who have published a report on their findings to coincide with Alcohol Awareness Week this week, alcohol is now 75% more affordable in relative terms than it was in 1980. The same period has also seen a massive rise in the incidence of alcohol related harm and violence across the North West and the rest of the UK. Figures released this week say that England will see 90,800 alcohol-related deaths over the next ten years. The financial cost of alcohol-related harm to the NHS in the North West alone is already estimated to be in excess of £400 million per year.

"Supermarket super-cheap deals are also having a devastating effect on local pubs, many of which are having a difficult time in the current recession," said Irving. "In some of the supermarkets we visited the amount of cheap booze piled up in the aisles and the sheer number of offers had to be seen to be believed. In an Asda in Widnes, out of 202

packs of beer, 105 were on special offer and in the same shop over half of the wine on sale was on special offer," Irving said.

Our Life claims that the supermarkets are responsible for the creation of a culture where the expectation of cheap alcohol is the norm rather than the exception. A culture which campaigners claim is driving up consumption and related harm.

"Everyone loves a bargain but the supermarkets' headlong rush to outdo each other in selling cheap alcohol is having grave consequences for the region's health," said Our Life chief executive Dr Alison Giles. "We know that the most harmful drinkers buy their alcohol from the supermarkets and young drinkers pre-load before hitting the pubs and clubs. These super-cheap deals are making it too easy for people to drink at harmful levels. It is irresponsible behaviour from companies who often say that they have their customers' interests at heart and it has to stop," said Dr Giles.

Our Life is calling for a code of conduct for the off-trade and legislation to introduce a minimum price per unit to tackle irresponsible alcohol promotions. "Supermarkets have to realise that they have a responsibility for what they sell and how they sell it," said Dr Giles. "It cannot be a coincidence that we see rising alcohol harm in the North West on the one hand and pocket-money drinks prices on the other. People in the North West can see the link between price and excessive consumption and they want action now to address the problem," Dr Giles said.

The report *Supermarket Scandal: Super-cheap Alcohol Sales in the North West* is available from Our Life.

## **ENDS**

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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.