



## Press Release

16 March 2009

### **NORTH WEST SHOULD PILOT MINIMUM PRICE FOR ALCOHOL SAYS PUBLIC HEALTH CAMPAIGN CHIEF**

Public health campaigners in the North West have called for the region to pilot the setting of a minimum price for alcoholic drinks in the wake of comments by England's chief medical officer Sir Liam Donaldson who has proposed a minimum price of 50p per unit of alcohol.

Region-wide health campaigning programme, Our Life, backed Donaldson's comments and said that urgent action was needed to tackle the rising unhealthy drinking culture in the region.

Our Life chief executive Dr Alison Giles said: "It cannot be acceptable that alcohol can be so cheap when it is the cause of so much harm to us as individuals and as communities. Following our Big Drink Debate survey last year, in which 80% of respondents said that they thought low price and discounts increased people's drinking, we'd like to see the North West taking a lead on this issue by becoming the first region in the country to pilot selling alcohol at a minimum price per unit."

Addressing concerns from some quarters that setting a minimum price would hit the disadvantaged during a recession, Giles said: "A minimum price will only affect those drinks most popular among our young people and those who drink at harmful levels. This is harm reduction amongst the vulnerable not kill-joying for the masses."

People and communities in the North West experience some of the worst harm from alcohol harm in the country. This has a huge impact not only on individuals but is costly to the NHS, police and other public services. One person is admitted to hospital for an alcohol related condition every seven minutes. This costs our NHS £400 million every year. Deaths from alcohol-related disease have doubled in a generation. 73,000 crimes a year are attributable to alcohol of which 50,000 are violent.

Giles said that Our Life would be pressing the case for the introduction of a minimum price for alcohol in the North West with a range of stakeholders including local and regional health officials, MPs, local councillors, community groups, the general public and the business community.

"We know that our young people and our heaviest drinkers are influenced by low prices. Without urgent action it will continue to be possible to buy five units of alcohol for the price of a fizzy soft drink. That cannot be right and we need to address this issue as a matter of urgency," said Giles.

ENDS

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## NOTES TO EDITOR

1. 30,000 people responded to the Big Drink Debate survey between May and the end of August 2008;
2. Our Life has been established to offer 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 first campaign for Our Life is The Big Drink Debate - to find out how people in the North West feel about their health and what their views are on alcohol;
4. The North West has the worst drinking levels in the country for people drinking at hazardous or harmful levels;
5. Deaths from alcohol-related causes have doubled in a generation;
6. In the North West, around 43,000 men and 28,000 women are admitted to hospital every year for an alcohol-related condition. That's around one person every seven minutes;
7. More than 73,000 recorded crimes across the North West last year were related to alcohol – of these 50,000 were violent offences;
8. The estimated costs of alcohol-related and alcohol specific crime in England is in the range of £9billion to £12billion;
9. The most deprived 20% of people in the North West suffer the effects of alcohol the most;
10. The questionnaire was compiled by the North West Public Health Observatory, who analysed the responses;
11. The Big Drink Debate is being funded by Our Life, and the Department of Health and Government Office in the North West. The views reported reflect the response to the Big Drink Debate survey and are not a statement of Government policy or intention;
12. Hazardous drinking for men is 22- 50 units per week and for women it is 15-35 units (Now known as Higher Risk Drinking);
13. Harmful drinking -Women who regularly drink over 6 units a day (or over 35 units a week)  
Men who regularly drink over 8 units a day (or over 50 units a week) (Now known as Increasing Risk Drinking).

## Definitions

### Government recommended sensible limits:

- adult men - no more than 3–4 units of alcohol a day;  
no more than 21 units of alcohol a week;
- adult women - no more than 2-3 units of alcohol a day;  
no more than 14 units of alcohol a week;

### Units in typical drinks

1 pint strong lager (5%) is 3 units

1 bottle of alcopops is 1.5 units

1 standard glass of wine (175ml/12%) is 2 units

1 measure spirit (25ml) is 1 unit.