

Adfam response: Alcohol Strategy Consultation

Adfam is the national umbrella organisation working to improve the quality of life for families affected by drug and alcohol use. We do this by working with a network of organisations, practitioners and individuals who come into contact with the families, friends and carers affected by someone else's drug or alcohol use. We provide direct support to families and practitioners through publications, training, consultancy, prison visitors' centres and signposting to local services, and work extensively with professionals and Government to improve and expand the support available to families.

Adfam has not answered each question from the consultation as many are outside our remit of the impact of substance use on families. However, we are supportive of [Alcohol Concern's full response](#) (pdf).

Q4: The aim of minimum unit pricing is to reduce the consumption of harmful and hazardous drinkers, while minimising the impact on responsible drinkers. Do you think that there are any other people, organisations or groups that could be particularly affected by a minimum unit price for alcohol?

Alcohol doesn't just harm the individuals who consume too much of it – it also affects their families. Adfam proposes that any discussions about the future of alcohol policy should account for the effects of excessive drinking on families and children.

Making alcohol more expensive may not reduce consumption for all groups of drinkers: it may just take up more of the family budget for those whose lives – physically, psychologically or socially – depend upon it. Whilst minimum pricing is an important step forward, and one which Adfam supports, cost is just one of many factors which influence drinking patterns.

Q13: What sources of evidence on alcohol-related health harm could be used to support the introduction of a cumulative impact policy (CIP) if it were possible for a CIP to include consideration of health?

Measures of overall consumption are a useful litmus test for alcohol-related harms, but such raw data does not constitute the be all and end all of alcohol policy: Adfam therefore welcomes the recognition that alcohol can have cumulative impacts on communities.

The input of families and children affected by alcohol misuse should be sought in calculating the cumulative impacts of alcohol-related harms, including impacts on the mental health of adult family members and the physical and emotional wellbeing of children.

Other comments

Binge drinking: Adfam's own research has shown that families can also face significant negative impacts from a loved one's binge drinking, or alcohol consumption which is not necessarily classed as 'dependent'. So it is heartening to see the Government recognise this alongside efforts to improve the treatment of those with alcohol dependency.

Information for families: Adfam's work has found that many families struggle to identify 'how much is too much' or what constitutes an alcohol problem. It is therefore welcome to see a Government strategy which emphasises the different impacts that alcohol can have on communities.

The Government's focus on alcohol, and the accompanying legislation, may start to make people analyse and confront their drinking – or that of a loved one – in new ways. Legal measures and punishments should be accompanied by a greater awareness of alcohol problems in the general population and the knock-on effects that any kind of substance dependency can have on families and children. Families should be equipped with the requisite knowledge to identify problem drinking behaviours, and also with the confidence to come forward for support for their own needs without feeling stigmatised. For those who seek support, there should be services available to meet their needs, including people who struggle with the day-to-day impact that problematic drinking can have on family life.

Building on the strategy: Minimum pricing and a ban on multi-buy promotions will not mean that drinking excessively becomes impossible overnight. Similarly, amending licensing controls for the on-trade will not impact upon the 50% of people who, according to Alcohol Concern, only drink at home. Patterns of alcohol misuse which have been developing, worsening or ongoing for years will not be solved easily or suddenly.

Introducing these measures, therefore, should not be the end of the story but the beginning of a more rounded view of alcohol consumption which takes into account not only the overall level of consumption amongst the general population, but also the harms that are routinely experienced by individual families where alcohol misuse is a problem: harms that, as noted by the Office of the Children's Commissioner in the 2012 report *Silent Voices*, may be hidden for years.

This strategy is explicitly focused on alcohol-fuelled crime and anti-social behaviour, and the Government's 2010 Drug Strategy seeks to address alcohol *dependence*. Whilst these may cover the most visible symptoms of alcohol misuse – those clinically dependent on alcohol and people causing city-centre chaos at weekends – alcohol has pernicious effects behind the closed doors of many family homes up and down the country. It is important that these are not forgotten, and that these families do not fall between the gaps of the two Government strategies.

Contact

