# Momentum builds for alcohol price reforms to tackle the harm caused by cheap booze

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### A highly targeted nation-wide minimum price on alcohol could deliver a dramatic reduction in alcohol harm, save lives and reduce alcohol consumption among the heaviest drinkers.

A highly targeted nation-wide minimum price on alcohol could deliver a dramatic reduction in alcohol harm, save lives and reduce alcohol consumption among the heaviest drinkers.

The evidence and international experience of minimum pricing as an effective measure to prevent and reduce the harmful use of alcohol and alcohol related-harm continues to gather momentum globally and within Australia.

Government support of a minimum pricing system for the sale of alcohol has been evidenced in Canada, the United States, Scotland, Ireland, several countries in Eastern Europe, and other Governments across the United Kingdom (UK) are currently considering price reform.

In the UK, Health campaigners remain hopeful that in coming days the Supreme Court gives the green light for the implementation of Scotland’s Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) plan.

Here in Australia, the Northern Territory Alcohol Policies and Legislation Review is considering a proposal for the introduction of a MUP on alcohol, while in Western Australia (WA), it was revealed in September that a minimum floor price on takeaway alcohol is being considered by WA Health Minister Roger Cook.

In the face of sustained opposition by global and national alcohol producers, top national and international alcohol harm experts meeting today at the Global Alcohol Policy Conference (GAPC) will deliver a compelling case for progressive alcohol price reform that focuses on increasing alcohol price and reducing availability and marketing.

Alcohol harm in Australia is a significant problem, and its toxicity continues to poison communities both physically and socially. Each year, more than 5,500 lives lost and more than 157,000 people are hospitalised as a result of alcohol.

Alcohol is not only one of our nation’s greatest preventive health challenges, but is increasingly being recognised as an obstacle to sustainable human development globally.

A minimum price per standard drink would impact the heaviest drinkers, binge drinkers and pre-loaders who are most likely to consume cheap alcohol and see a decline in alcohol attributable hospitalisations and deaths. The measure would have limited impact on moderate drinkers.

Katherine Brown, Chief Executive of the Institute of Alcohol Studies (UK) will Chair a GAPC Pre-Conference Symposium on tackling cheap alcohol today.

Ms Brown says that it is well documented that cheap alcohol products are favoured by the heaviest drinkers, and that lower prices increase heavy drinking.

“Cheap alcohol destroys lives and it is often the poorest and most vulnerable that suffer the most. All the evidence shows that raising the price of the cheapest drink is the most powerful tool at the disposal of governments to curb alcohol harm,” Ms Brown said.

Ms Brown says minimum pricing would make a significant impact on health inequalities with 80% of lives saved coming from the most deprived groups in society.

“This policy must be considered by governments that are serious about saving lives and protecting the vulnerable.” Ms Brown said.

FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn said introducing a minimum price would be one of the single most effective ways of alleviating the harms associated with alcohol consumption and even if hazardous and harmful drinkers are less responsive to price increases than other drinkers, the research evidence indicates that their alcohol consumption would still decline.

“The relationship between alcohol price, harms and consumption is clear: price changes lead to changes in consumption habits amongst the heaviest drinkers. Governments need to boldly accept the fact that alcohol abuse is driven by cheap booze that is readily available and persistently promoted,” Mr Thorn said.

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