

For over 500 days the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill (PHAB) - a progressive piece of legislation designed to change the culture of drinking in Ireland - has languished in the Oireachtas.

The Bill contains a range of measures designed to work **together** to reduce alcohol consumption in Ireland in order to reduce alcohol related harm. It will protect children, families and communities from harms and create an environment that supports a low risk approach to alcohol consumption.

Drinking alcohol is an individual choice. However collectively, as a society, there are significant social and economic impacts to our high risk alcohol consumption. In a free, open market economy, business must have the freedom to develop and prosper. And, while citizens must take responsibility for own actions, society and our government, cannot rely on this approach alone as it grapples with the consequences, costs and impact of excessive alcohol consumption and the resultant harms. Over two generations Ireland's consumption has increased threefold, and is continuing to rise.

Today, we face a growing chronic disease crisis as cancer, heart disease, liver disease and diabetes now accounts for the most of our ill-health and premature deaths. This crisis places an extraordinary, and unnecessary, burden on our scarce health services and limited public resources.

The market will not resolve our problem with alcohol. The state must have the right to protect its citizens, especially its children. Evidence based research dictates that public action must be taken now to curb our high risk levels of alcohol consumption. The rights of private economic interests must be rebalanced to allow for a reasonable public intervention that supports a responsible society's endeavour to live healthier, and more productive, lives.

An overview of the economic and social impact of alcohol consumption and related harms in Ireland:

- **Over 12% of the health current expenditure budget is spent on alcohol related illnesses.**
- **Every day, 1,500 beds in our hospitals are occupied by patients with alcohol related problems.**
- **283,866 work days were lost to alcohol related absenteeism in 2016**
- **Every day 3 people will die from alcohol related illnesses.**
- **Alcohol is a factor in half of all suicides, and one third of self-harm cases, in Ireland.**
- **Each year 60,000 children will inexcusably begin their, all too early, drinking careers.**
- **The life of one in every eleven children is being negatively impacted by parental drinking.**
- **The annual cost of alcohol related illness and harm costs the Irish exchequer €1.5bn, that is 3% of all public current expenditure;**
- **The cost of excessive alcohol consumption is a major drain on current public expenditure: Health, Justice, Social Protection; it is estimated that for €100m of public monies spent, €4.6m will be deployed to mitigate the harmful outcomes of alcohol consumption.**

The Public Health (Alcohol) Bill will reduce the harms arising from high risk alcohol consumption by establishing regulation on price, labelling, marketing and availability of alcohol, so protecting children and vulnerable adults:

Minimum Unit Pricing

The Bill provides for a minimum unit price for alcohol products. Minimum Unit Price (MUP) is a targeted measure designed to stop strong drink with the highest alcohol content being sold at the lowest price.

- **MUP will not affect the price of alcohol products in pubs, clubs and restaurants, with no related impact to domestic industries or exporters arising.**
- **As an instrument of public policy, a joint approach between both Governments on the island of Ireland has been agreed on its commencement, so avoiding any unintended consequences, particularly in relation to cross border shopping.**
- **MUP will not be inflationary; it will largely have no impact on the price of the seven alcohol products currently within the Central Statistics Office's CPI rebase, Basket of 100 Goods and Services**

Research findings on MUP systems operating in Canadian provinces demonstrate an overall decrease in alcohol consumption per capita. This instrument of public policy has also been adopted by the Scottish government.

Alcohol marketing and promotion

The Public Health (Alcohol) Bill contains a modest set of regulations that will limit the appeal of alcohol advertising to children and young people. Future product advertisements must only give specific information about the nature of the product such as its origins, price or taste description. This will ensure that alcohol advertising is no longer emotive or glamorising, and that product engagement is not aligned to physical performance, personal and social success, or other perceived positive outcomes.

- **Evidence based research has demonstrated that alcohol marketing including advertising, sponsorship and other forms of promotion, increases the likelihood that children will start to use alcohol, and to drink more, if they are already taking alcohol.**

Everyday children and young people are continuously exposed to positive, risk free promotion of alcohol and its use. The Bill purposes a very limited measure to reduce the level of alcohol brand exposure allowed at sporting events where children attend.

In 2016, alcohol companies in Ireland spend nearly €1m per week on direct advertising campaigns (2016: €47.03m; Nielsen Media Research).

The Irish Sponsorship market is expected to show a 6% growth to €173 million in 2017 (Onside:2017).

Health Labelling

The legislation will ensure that all alcohol products carry health advice and warning.

- Citizens must have the right to make informed purchasing decisions about the products they consume, which are harmful to their health.
- Public health warnings on labels have proven to be effective on tobacco products in terms of increasing awareness of harmful effects and modifying cultural behaviour. Currently all food producers must display a set of mandatory information on a label.

The changes envisaged within the legislative measures, which have a three-year transition period of compliance, would merely require an addition to, or redesign of existing content.

Product Separation

The measures within the legislation will ensure that alcohol products sold in mixed retail outlets will be appropriately segregated. The changes, which have a one-year transition period for compliance, also state that alcohol products, and promotions display, are not readily visible to the shopping public, and that the public do not have to pass through the area to gain access to, or purchase, any other products.

- The reasonable measures proposed will not prevent current retail outlets from continuing to sell existing, or new, alcohol products from their premises.

The mass availability of alcohol products in our shops, is facilitating our high consumption of alcohol. The ubiquitous presence of alcohol, even on the most routine shopping trip, has enabled an adult population to casually, and impulsively, purchase alcohol products in the same manner as every day grocery items. However, alcohol is not an everyday grocery. Its impact on the individual and the wider community is significant.

It is our strong belief that these measures, taken together, will provide a reasonable, pragmatic means to achieving the ambition of this progressive public health initiative.

For these reasons, we ask you to again reflect on the urgent need to act. Many legislators have voiced support for the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill, yet sought to weaken specific measures; the cohesiveness of all the Bill's measures will be its, and yours, historic legacy.

If you have any queries on the Bill, or wish to discuss the efficacy of its measures, please don't hesitate to call us. We'll be happy to assist.

Thank you.



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**The Public Health (Alcohol)
Bill will save lives and
build a healthier society.**

#PHABsaveLives