



09 Oct 2018

West Australian, Perth

Author: Julia Stafford • Section: General News • Article Type: News Item
Audience : 147,676 • Page: 18 • Printed size: 396.00cm² • Region: WA
Market: Australia • ASR: AUD 6,943 • words: 725 • Item ID: 1019496240

isentia.mediaportal

Licensed by Copyright Agency. You may only copy or communicate this work with a licence.

Page 1 of 2

WA needs minimum floor price for alcohol

| Julia Stafford

With the introduction of a minimum floor price for alcohol in the Northern Territory this month, Territorians can look forward to fewer assaults, less pressure on their emergency departments and improved health outcomes in the longer term.

Evidence shows that putting a floor price on alcohol works to reduce harm, especially among heavier drinkers. Attention now turns to which jurisdiction will be the next to address the problems of cheap alcohol. A strong case can be made for that to be Western Australia.

West Australians drink at levels above the national average, and that reflects in ongoing burdens on our hospitals, emergency departments, and police resources. St John Ambulance WA figures show that in 2017, almost 15 ambulances per day were called out for the primary reason of alcohol intoxication. That's 5324 ambulances that were not available to attend to other emergencies. Of these, over nine ambulances per week treated WA young people aged 18 years and younger because they were so drunk they needed urgent medical attention. At peak times, one in five patients in WA emergency departments is there because of alcohol; the average across Australia is one in eight.

Minimum pricing sets a floor price per standard drink below which alcohol cannot be sold. Using the example of the NT, a floor price of \$1.30 per standard drink means a bottle of wine with seven standard drinks

will cost at least \$9.10. It's a policy targeted towards reducing drinking among the heaviest drinkers, while

having minimal, if any, impact on moderate drinkers. This is because heavier drinkers buy cheaper alcohol and more of it, than lighter drinkers.

Today, the 70 supporting organisations of the WA Alcohol and Youth Action Coalition have thrown their support behind an alcohol floor price for WA. These health and community groups, including the Australian Medical Association WA, Cancer Council WA, WA Council of Social Services, Telethon Kids Institute, and WA Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies, recognise the important contribution minimum pricing could make as part of a comprehensive strategy for reducing alcohol harms.

Roger Cook, WA's Deputy Premier and Minister for Health and Mental Health, has recognised the potential benefits of minimum pricing for reducing harm from cheap alcohol, and has encouraged community discussion on this issue noting, "we simply cannot stand by and watch some of the most vulnerable people in our society be consumed by cheap alcohol". Experts at the WA Preventive Health Summit earlier this year expressed clear support for minimum pricing as an effective public health policy. Encouraging levels of public support were also identified in a survey commissioned by the McCusker Centre, which found 58 per cent of WA adults would support the introduction of a minimum price to prevent the sale of very cheap alcohol, another 18 per cent were neutral and only 24 per cent opposed.

Setting a floor price would increase the prices of only the cheapest alcohol products, and limit the heavy-discounting we currently see from the major bottleshop chains. Most



09 Oct 2018

West Australian, Perth

Author: Julia Stafford • Section: General News • Article Type: News Item
Audience : 147,676 • Page: 18 • Printed size: 396.00cm² • Region: WA
Market: Australia • ASR: AUD 6,943 • words: 725 • Item ID: 1019496240

 isentia.mediaportal

Licensed by Copyright Agency. You may only copy or communicate this work with a licence.

Page 2 of 2

products would already be priced above the minimum and wouldn't be affected, including most drinks in restaurants, bars, and pubs.

Evidence from Canada, which has had minimum pricing since the 1990s, shows a 10 per cent increase in the minimum price reduced alcohol use by between 3 per cent and 8 per cent and also reduced alcohol-related traffic offences, violence, hospital admissions, and deaths. As governments around the world look for effective approaches to reduce the impacts of alcohol, momentum is building for minimum pricing. Scotland introduced a floor price in May, and other countries are expected to follow soon. The Northern Territory Government was the first in Australia, adopting a floor price from October 1, and cementing its commitment for putting the evidence first and prioritising the health and safety of the community.

The time is right for WA to move towards introducing a minimum price on alcohol, and to ensure appropriate support is available for those who would be most affected. There are no magic bullets in tackling harm from alcohol, but as an evidence-based approach to reducing the drinking of the heaviest drinkers, that costs little to implement, and benefits the whole community, setting a minimum price comes about as close as it gets.

■ Julia Stafford is executive officer, McCusker Centre for Action on Alcohol and Youth, Curtin University