

## Alcohol Academy response to the new Government Alcohol Strategy

The Alcohol Academy welcomes the new 2012 'Government Alcohol Strategy', in particular for its commitment to:

- **Minimum unit pricing (MUP)**; there is a clear link between price and consumption. With the increase in the affordability of alcohol over recent decades, consumption has increased. Whilst even a 50 pence per unit MUP will not solve alcohol-related harms, introducing a 40 pence MUP is clearly an important and bold policy measure to support an effective national strategy.
- **Recognition of the role of advertising, multi-buy promotions and other activities** as important determinants on consumption and harm. The environment adults and children and young people are surrounded by inevitably affects their choices – exposure to direct or indirect messages play an important role in forming attitudes that may influence or normalise alcohol use or misuse.
- **Identification and Brief Advice (IBA)**; IBA is one of the most effective individual level actions that can help to reduce alcohol misuse if widely delivered. It has an international evidence base and can be delivered across many settings - recent SIPS research found that in many cases the simplest intervention can be equally effective.
- **Recognition of alcohol within important inter-linked issues**; effective action to reduce alcohol-related harms must involve cross-cutting approaches across key areas as Mental Health, Children and Young People, Sexual Health and Domestic Violence as identified within the strategy.
- **Action to ensure licensing decisions and laws take broader account of the effects of alcohol and its impact on communities**; including consultation on the role of health as a possible Licensing objective. Action to address the practically un-enforced law prohibiting the sale of alcohol to drunken persons is also welcomed.

However, there are a number of areas the Academy feel could have been further addressed:

### **The importance of local level action and leadership**

Although the strategy recognises the role of local partnerships and local Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs), further emphasis on the importance of effective, multi-component local level alcohol strategies could have been made. Strong local strategies, bringing a range of partners together and driving investment are key to effective alcohol

harm reduction. This includes the need for local champions and resources to drive strategic and coordinated approaches. Many local areas have made good progress, especially those with local alcohol strategy leads and committed partnerships. Actions such as IBA require specific leadership and buy-in to secure successful implementation. So although including alcohol within health checks or possibly the QOF as the strategy suggests is welcomed, this will not alone result in effective delivery on the ground. SIPS research and the limited success of DES implementation have demonstrated such barriers cannot be underestimated.

### **Investment in alcohol treatment and early intervention**

Although the strategy recognises the need for investment in IBA and alcohol treatment, further commitment could have been set out for such invest-to-save measures. The Academy supports Alcohol Concern's long-made call for further investment in alcohol treatment, and would like to have seen the strategy give further recognition of the need to develop local treatment capacity that meets a range of needs. As NICE sets out, the need for psychosocial interventions for higher risk drinkers who may have no or only mild alcohol dependence is a particular area of importance.

### **The need for high quality alcohol commissioning**

In 2009 the Department of Health published 'Signs for Improvement' alcohol commissioning guidance. This has since been followed by a comprehensive set of NICE guidance and tools on for alcohol treatment commissioning. Further emphasis on the need for consistent high quality alcohol commissioning to support further investment would have helped to emphasise the importance in meeting local needs and addressing health inequalities. The impact of integrated substance misuse services on alcohol treatment objectives also needs to be recognised.

### **Commitment to action on alcohol and the workplace**

Alcohol misuse and its impact on the workplace is estimated to cost at least £6.4 billion each year. There is much employers can do to reduce these costs and bring benefits to their organisations as well as the health of individuals. Although there is a small mention of an expectation of workplace progress within the Responsibility Deal, the strategy could have committed to a firmer actions and leadership in this key area.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the Academy believes the Government Alcohol Strategy accounts for most of the key areas necessary to make progress on alcohol harm reduction. However it must support consistent local level action as the driving force behind overall progress. Effective and consistent local action on alcohol is at risk from the wider changes taking



place within public sector reforms and pressures on budgets. National level policies, which must not over-rely on voluntary action, will not work without sustained progress at local level.

## Notes

A round up of reaction and comments to the strategy can be found on the Alcohol Policy UK blog here:

<http://www.alcoholpolicy.net/2012/04/responses-to-the-government-alcohol-strategy.html>

A review of the strategy and its relation to evidence on some of the measures including price and availability can be found on the Alcohol Research UK blog at:

<http://alcoholresearchuk.org/2012/03/30/the-governments-alcohol-strategy/>

An Alcohol Concern response to the strategy can be found here:

<http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/news-centre/news/government-launches-alcohol-strategy>

For alcohol-related guidance, tools and resources visit the Alcohol Learning Centre:

[www.alcohollearningcentre.org.uk](http://www.alcohollearningcentre.org.uk)

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[www.alcoholpolicy.net](http://www.alcoholpolicy.net) news and analysis for the alcohol harm reduction field

[www.alcoholacademy.net](http://www.alcoholacademy.net) supporting effective alcohol harm reduction