

IPH response to the Government Alcohol Advisory Group

31 Jan 2008

Below is a submission to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reforms recently established Government Alcohol Advisory Group. This follows the groups invitation for submissions from interested parties and the general public on key aspects of the law governing the sale and consumption of alcohol. Further information is available on their website

<http://www.justice.ie/>

Submission to the Government Alcohol Advisory Group

The Institute of Public Health in Ireland (IPH) welcomes the call for submissions by the Government Alcohol Advisory Group and commends the Justice Minister, Brian Lenihan TD., for establishing this group.

IPH aims to improve health on the island of Ireland, by working to combat health inequalities and influence public policies in favour of health. IPH promotes cooperation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in research, training, information and policy.

A report from IPH, Inequalities in Mortality 1989-1998 – A report on all-Ireland mortality data found that those in the lowest occupational class are 280% more likely to die from alcohol abuse than those in the highest occupational class. The poorer you are the more likely your life will be negatively impacted by alcohol. In addition, alcohol is a contributory factor to deaths from accidents, which also show a pronounced socio-economic gradient.

Across the island there is serious concern about the degree of alcohol related harm. IPH believes that concerted legislative action is required. Specific public order measures are needed and these offer potential benefits to the health of people throughout Ireland.

IPH supports the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland, Faculty of Public Health Medicine in its submission to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

The Advisory Group identifies three areas of concern:

Area of concern 1

There is a link between the availability of alcohol and consumption patterns and many international groups conclude that alcohol availability should be limited. IPH supports this view as the availability of alcohol in Ireland has increased significantly thus increasing consumption. IPH therefore supports the Royal College of Physicians' call for a publicly accessible register of all premises holding licences for the off-purchase of alcohol.

We also believe that there should be an end to special promotions by supermarkets.

We believe that the Department of Health and Children should lead the development of new legislation in relation to minimum pricing of alcohol.

Area of concern 2

There has been a dramatic increase in the granting of special exemptions and IPH believes there should be a limit on the number of special exemptions offered to each licence holder in any given year.

Area of concern 3

Current sanctions and penalties relating to underage alcohol consumption are not working. IPH supports the recommendations of the Faculty of Public Health Medicine to set up a traceability mechanism to identify the source of bottled alcohol. We believe that this would be a deterrent to irresponsible serving. We also recommend stricter enforcement of legislation and penalties for the sale of alcohol to those under 18.

In view of the harm that is done by rising levels of alcohol use we believe that all these areas of concern offer scope for practical benefits from further North/South cooperation in developing policy approaches and evaluating their impact.

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