

Loss of minimum pricing on alcohol is a missed opportunity

BMA Scotland have expressed deep disappointment over the Parliament's rejection of minimum pricing during the final debate on The Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill.

Dr Brian Keighley, Chairman of the BMA in Scotland, said:

"This is a missed opportunity for our parliamentarians who had a real opportunity to drive forward public health policy, not just in Scotland but in the rest of the world. All politicians acknowledge that price is a significant factor in the level of alcohol consumption, so it is particularly disappointing that opponents voted down minimum pricing but did not propose any credible alternative.

"I am frustrated and disappointed that the debate on such a serious health issue has been polarised and that many opposition MSPs had made their minds up before even considering the evidence.

"The inclusion of a 'sunset clause' offered an opportunity to test the effectiveness of minimum pricing and provide doubters with the reassurances they had initially sought. Sadly, now we will never know.

"I hope that this is not the end of the debate on how we tackle the increasing affordability of alcohol, but signals the beginning of a mature, non-partisan approach to address Scotland's relationship with alcohol."

Health Secretary Nicola Sturgeon was also disappointed that the main opposition parties failed to back proposals to introduce minimum pricing for alcohol.

As passed, the bill will:

- * Ban quantity discounts such as 'three for two' or '25 per cent off when you buy six'*
- * Restrict alcohol promotions in off-sales*
- * Introduce a Challenge 25 age verification scheme for all licensed premises*
- * Pave the way for the introduction of a social responsibility levy to ensure those who profit from the sale of alcohol also put something back into the community*

Ms Sturgeon said:

"I am disappointed that the legislation we have passed today is not as strong as we would have liked or as it could have been. It has, undoubtedly, been diluted through the absence of minimum pricing, which would save lives and reduce crime.

"However we should not lose sight of what has been achieved. We have had a wide-ranging debate on alcohol pricing and there is now widespread recognition across the country of the need to tackle pricing – though, sadly, support was lacking in parliament today.

"This legislation is also just part of the work ongoing in Scotland to tackle our unhealthy relationship with alcohol. Our Alcohol Framework is a comprehensive package of more than 40 measures and we are making significant progress to implement these.

"We have also invested a record £100 million in prevention, treatment and support services over the last three years.

"I believe this bill is an important milestone towards changing Scotland's relationship with alcohol. But I am also clear that the journey is not over. There is more work to be done and we will not shirk from leading the way in addressing this challenge."