

Alcohol pricing policies save lives and increase profits, experts say

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Setting minimum prices for alcohol increases health and economic benefits, say international experts, who met today for a seminar on alcohol pricing and public health.

The meeting—sponsored by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), the Centre for Addictions Research of British Columbia (CARBC) and the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA)—focused on new analyses on Ontario and other provinces where minimum pricing policies have been implemented for a number of years.

Alcohol costs the Canadian economy \$14.6 billion in indirect healthcare and social costs each year. Second only to tobacco, alcohol is a major contributor to the onset of disability and disease in the developed world, according to the [World Health Organization](#).

Research indicates that pricing and taxation are among the most effective [policy interventions](#) to decrease the harms related to alcohol use. Though minimum pricing strategies have not yet been introduced outside of Canada, various countries are now looking towards minimum pricing policies that could mitigate the illnesses, injuries and social problems associated with [alcohol misuse](#).

CAMH Senior Scientist Dr. Norman Giesbrecht, who chaired the meeting, discussed new findings showing that those who paid less (per unit) for alcohol tended to consume more drinks. His team, in

collaboration with Dr. Tim Stockwell, Director of CARBC at the University of Victoria, recently collected data from 1,000 adults in Ontario on alcohol purchases, drinking patterns and attitudes towards pricing.

"There is a lot of evidence that says higher pricing of alcohol is a powerful way to control consumption and lower negative affects," says Dr. Giesbrecht. "It makes a difference."

Dr. Stockwell's new research on the effectiveness of minimum price polices in British Columbia and Saskatchewan found significant reductions in overall [alcohol consumption](#) in both provinces. What's more, alcohol-related deaths and hospitalizations decreased in British Columbia, following increases to minimum alcohol prices.

"The evidence is crystal clear," remarks Dr. Stockwell. "It's a win-win-win situation. It means more government revenue, more profits for industry, and better health outcomes."

Despite some public opposition to setting higher minimum prices for alcohol, Dr. Stockwell says that new policies won't have much impact on the average consumer. Pricing strategies are meant to target heavy drinkers who tend to drink inexpensive alcohol.

Drs. John Holmes and Daniel Hill-McManus, both researchers from the University of Sheffield, referenced the recent proposal for minimum [alcohol pricing](#) in the United Kingdom. Many believe that that the policy model, which is based on Canadian data—partially collected by CAMH—was central to these policy discussions.

Other presenters included Dr. Jürgen Rehm, Director of CAMH's Social and Epidemiological Research and Dr. Gerald Thomas, a senior researcher and policy analyst at the Canadian Centre on Substance

Abuse.

More information: View the full report at:
www.camh.ca/en/research/news_and_publications/Documents/Canada%20-%20Minimum%20Pricing%20Report.pdf

Provided by Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

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