

Charity funding study brings alcohol industry influence on UK policy into question

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Five charities in the UK are both active in alcohol policy processes and funded by the alcohol industry, according to a new study published in the *European Journal of Public Health*.

The study, carried out by researchers at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, looks at the relationships between the [alcohol industry](#), charities and policy influence in the UK.

Two of the charities, Addaction and Mentor UK, are the only remaining non-industry, non-governmental members of the Public Health Responsibility Deal's alcohol network – the UK government's initiative to work collaboratively with the alcohol industry for public health policy making. All other public health interest groups resigned from the network, mostly due to concerns over industry influence on policy, and the decision not to implement minimum unit pricing last year.

Senior author Dr Jim McCambridge of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine said: "Our work raises interesting questions about the extent to which the alcohol industry is using UK charities to further interests. Policy makers in the UK need to consider whether current levels of transparency in policy-making best serve public benefit. It is well established that the tobacco industry has used corporate philanthropy as a political device, though little attention internationally has previously been paid to the alcohol industry and charities."

By investigating the charity commission website and financial records of

1,400 charities in England and Wales, the researchers identified the sources of funding for charities involved in UK alcohol policy.

Addaction and Mentor UK were found to have received industry funding alongside public sector grants, and are active in alcohol policy.

Addaction offers services to people affected by drug and alcohol problems, and received £351,000 from Heineken UK in 2011/12.

Mentor UK offers mentoring programmes to protect children from alcohol and drugs, and received 25% of its income from spirit producer Diageo in 2008/09.

In addition to Addaction and Mentor UK, three other charities - Drinkaware, The Robertson Trust and British Institute of Innkeeping – were also found to have received almost all their income from the alcohol industry or from people working in the industry and have senior alcohol industry figures as trustees.

The authors say the limitations of the study include the confidentiality of some donors in annual reports and accounts, as it is not a legal requirement for charities to disclose all funding sources in annual reports.

Dr Jim McCambridge explains: "There could be much more industry funding of alcohol charities than we uncovered in our study as [charities](#) are not required to declare all funding sources. Charities operating in alcohol or other policy arenas should be required to declare any possible conflicts of interest from funding sources, to ensure greater transparency."

Addaction, which works with people addicted to drink and drugs, has received £1m from Asda and £560,000 from Heineken during the past three years. Mentor UK, which works to prevent alcohol-related harm among children, accepted £421,000 between 2008-09 and 2012-13, and

a further £100,000 since. That included £371,000 from the drinks company Diageo and £100,000 from two trusts funded by profits from sales of alcohol.

More information: *European Journal of Public Health*. [DOI: 10.1093/eurpub/cku076](https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/cku076)

Provided by London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

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