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German addiction researchers urge a national plan to curb alcohol and tobacco use

They said Germany ranks second to last among 18 countries on prevention and blamed tobacco and alcohol for more than 205,000 deaths a year

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German addiction researchers called on Tuesday, November 24 for a national plan to curb alcohol and tobacco use, arguing that the country has fallen behind much of Europe on prevention and regulation.

The appeal came in Frankfurt during the presentation of the 13th Alternative Drug and Addiction Report. Heino Stöver, a drug researcher who chairs the association akzept, said Germany lacks a coordinated national alcohol and tobacco control strategy and performs poorly in international comparisons. He pointed to the Public Health Index, which he said placed Germany second to last among 18 countries on addiction prevention.

Stöver said the federal government’s drug commissioner has no clear strategy, no dedicated budget and no campaigns strong enough to address the problem. He also criticized what he described as weak coordination between federal and state authorities and a lack of structured cooperation with drug aid groups and self-help organizations. He said countries such as Switzerland and Spain have taken a more coordinated approach.

The researchers tied their demands to public health figures that they said show the scale of the issue. According to Stöver, tobacco causes about 131,000 deaths a year in Germany, making it the country’s biggest avoidable health risk. He said alcohol consumption causes more than 74,000 deaths a year and is an accompanying factor in about 300,000 violent acts annually.

Among the measures proposed, Stöver called for health warnings on alcohol bottle labels similar to those used on cigarette packs. He also said alcohol-free spaces should be expanded beyond train stations in a way comparable to smoking restrictions, arguing that people should not be confronted with alcohol everywhere in public life.

He further proposed raising the minimum age for buying beer and wine in Germany from 16 to 18. Stöver said Sweden had seen positive results from selling alcohol only in specialized stores. He also criticized the easy availability of cigarettes in Germany, saying the country has about 340,000 cigarette vending machines, more than any other nation, and that tobacco prices are not high by European standards.

As an example of tougher regulation abroad, Stöver said England has moved to prohibit the purchase of tobacco products by people born in or after 2009. His broader argument was that Germany has relied too heavily on access and personal responsibility, while other countries have used pricing, sales restrictions and public health campaigns more aggressively.

The proposals are not government policy, but they could matter for the drinks business if they gain political support. Higher purchase ages for beer and wine, mandatory warning labels and tighter rules on where alcohol may be sold or consumed could affect market access, packaging and distribution for brewers, wineries and spirits companies operating in Germany.

The report adds pressure to a policy debate that has grown as health experts push for stronger prevention tools and industry groups watch for possible changes to sales rules. For now, the recommendations remain part of an outside report rather than an announced government package, but they put stricter alcohol and tobacco regulation back into the public discussion in Europe’s largest economy.