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Scotland ponders a rise in alcohol minimum unit price

Proposal to elevate unit pricing comes amid discussions on public health outcomes

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Scotland is contemplating an increase in its Minimum Unit Price (MUP) for alcohol to 65p per unit, following suggestions from ministers earlier this week. Established in 2018 at a rate of 50p per unit, the existing MUP scheme is slated to conclude on 30 April 2024.

Elena Whitham, who oversees the nation's drugs and alcohol policy, introduced a consultation this week aimed at considering an upward adjustment of the unit price. Sky News reported on this potential change, noting Whitham's proposal specifically targets the 65p price point.

Various advocacy groups, including Alcohol Focus Scotland, have been lobbying for such an increase, indicating that the proposed adjustment aligns with the aspirations of a significant portion of stakeholders invested in Scotland's public health and safety.

In defending the need for a revision in the pricing structure, Whitham highlighted the importance of continuing efforts to counter alcohol-related harm. She emphasized the significant accomplishments of the Scottish government's MUP policy, which she described as "world-leading." The policy has not only saved numerous lives since its inception but also played a pivotal role in reducing hospital admissions attributable to alcohol. Moreover, the policy has been instrumental in alleviating health inequalities within the nation.

Recent governmental surveys aimed at stakeholders in the alcohol industry revealed diverse opinions on the future of the MUP. The options on the table ranged from maintaining the current price of 50p to considering escalations to 60p, 70p, 80p, or even exceeding 80p.

However, the policy has not been without its critics. Tory MSP Dr. Sandesh Gulhane expressed concerns about the validity of claims regarding the MUP's efficacy. Dr. Gulhane recently reached out to the UK Statistics Authority, urging a comprehensive investigation into a report by Public Health Scotland. This report asserted that the MUP for alcohol has been delivering favorable health outcomes, a claim that Dr. Gulhane believes warrants thorough scrutiny.

As the consultation process unfolds, it remains to be seen what the final decision will be concerning the MUP. With strong arguments on both sides of the aisle, the forthcoming deliberations promise to be both comprehensive and consequential for Scotland's public health trajectory.