

What would you choose?

Briefing on alcohol duty, by the Alcohol Health Alliance, 2019

Annual tax giveaways of more than £1bn to alcohol companies could fund the salaries of 40,000 nurses. What would you choose?

Alcohol continues to cause substantial harm to families and communities across the UK. Alcohol treatment can be fundamental to help people turn their lives around.

“Before I started treatment for my alcohol addiction, my life was on a downward spiral. I had lost contact with my family. Thanks to Forward Leeds, I'm now back in my family's lives and am determined to be the dad and grandad they deserve.” *Eddie, who successfully completed treatment at the Humankind-led service, Forward Leeds*



However, only 1 in 5 people who need treatment for alcohol dependency are getting the support they need.¹ This is partly because public health budgets have been cut every year since 2014. Alcohol and other drug services have faced the biggest cuts: across England, expenditure on treatment has fallen by 18%.² Vulnerable people are falling through the net.

Instead of helping people rebuild their lives, the government has been prioritising the interests of alcohol companies – and has cut or frozen alcohol duty for six out of the last seven years.

This means that, in real terms, beer duty is now 18% lower than in 2012, cider and spirits duty are 10% lower, and wine duty is 2% lower.³ Cumulatively, these cuts will cost the Treasury over £1.2bn in 2018/19, and a total of £9.1bn by 2023.⁴



We are urging the Government to prioritise reducing the harm alcohol causes instead of supporting the drinks companies that fuel it. **The government needs to increase alcohol duty by 2% above inflation in this year's Budget to invest in public health and prevention services.**

The majority of the public (52%) support higher taxes for alcohol if the money raised goes into funding public services impacted by alcohol use, such as the NHS and police.⁵ What would you choose?

¹ Public Health England (2018), [PHE inquiry into the falling numbers of people in alcohol treatment: findings](#).

² BBC News (2018), [Drug and alcohol services cut by £162m as deaths increase](#).

³ Institute of Alcohol Studies (2018), [Budget 2018 analysis](#).

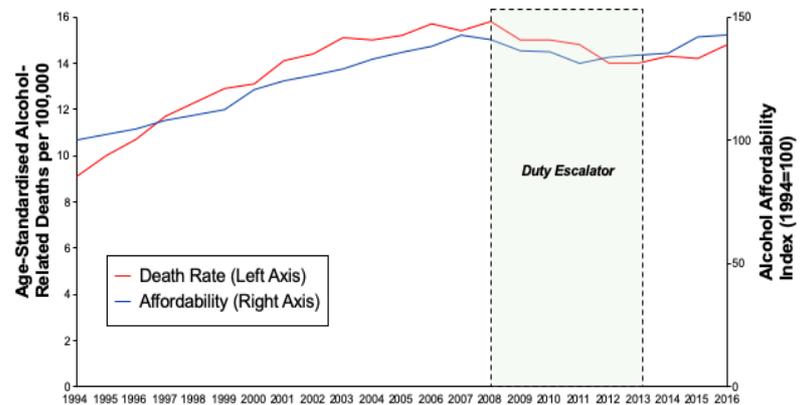
⁴ Institute of Alcohol Studies (2018), [Budget 2018 analysis](#).

⁵ Alcohol Health Alliance (2018), [What we think, how we drink](#).

Alcohol taxes can save lives

Alcohol is the leading risk factor for death and disability for 15-49 years olds.⁶ Every day, more than 80 people die of alcohol-related causes across the UK.⁷ Alcohol also affects others by contributing to rates of child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, family breakdown, and crime and disorder.

Public Health England (PHE) and the World Health Organization (WHO) recommend taxes as one of the most effective, and cost-effective, ways to reduce alcohol harm.⁸ Between 2008 and 2013, alcohol duty in the UK was automatically increased by 2% above inflation every year. This was highly effective in reducing harm: alcohol-related deaths peaked in 2008 (the year it was introduced), fell while it was in place, and have started rising again after it was abolished (see graph).⁹



This is consistent with the progress made in reducing smoking rates, where raising tobacco taxes has been recognised as particularly effective.¹⁰



“The government needs to recognise that alcohol is a highly addictive drug and should be doing more to protect society’s most vulnerable from its grip. They changed the law on smoking and cigarettes, now action is needed on alcohol as the impact on people and the wider society is so destructive.” *Dave Angel, who was alcohol-dependent and is now working for a homelessness charity*

What can you do to help?

Please write to the Chancellor and ask for a 2% increase in alcohol duty in this year’s Budget.

If you’d like suggested wording for a letter or further information, please get in touch with Sarah, the AHA’s Policy and Advocacy Manager, on 020 7222 4001 or sarah.schoenberger@ahauk.org.

⁶ Griswold, Max G et al. (2018), [Alcohol use and burden for 195 countries and territories, 1990–2016: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2016](#). The Lancet.

⁷ The UK wide estimate comes from summing the most recent estimates from England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales, which all use slightly different definitions of alcohol-related deaths: PHE (2016), [Local Alcohol Profiles for England](#); ScotPHO (2018), [Hospital admissions, deaths and overall burden of disease attributable to alcohol consumption in Scotland](#); Public Health Wales Observatory (last updated 2019), [Alcohol in Wales](#); Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2019), [Alcohol Related Deaths 2007-2017](#).

⁸ Public Health England (2016), [The public health burden of alcohol: evidence review](#); WHO (2010), [Global status report on non-communicable diseases](#).

⁹ Sheron, N. (2017), [Alcohol related liver disease: prevention and prediction](#).

¹⁰ Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. [Raising cigarette taxes reduces smoking, especially among kids \(and the cigarette companies know it\)](#).