



## **An Open Letter.**

### ***Our choice is to save lives***

For seven years, we as an Alliance of healthcare professionals, NGOs and public health advocates have sought to encourage a constructive new direction in public alcohol policy. Our commitment was to ensure that Ireland's chronic problematic use of alcohol was addressed as a public health crisis.

Crucially, we believe, informed by international best policy evidence, that adequate control and regulation had to be established in order to curb the demand for alcohol. This will ensure that less alcohol is purchased with consequent reduction in alcohol harms. This would be particularly helpful to those who caused themselves, and others, the most harm through persistent binge and heavy drinking.

The public health objectives of reducing the high rate of alcohol related deaths and lessening the alcohol harm was paramount. Today, three people will die directly because of alcohol and seven indirectly, in Ireland. Over the past 40 years the mortality rate from alcohol-related liver disease has increased 400%.

Central to this public health approach was the need to address the universal availability of cheap strong alcohol in every community throughout Ireland. This damaging situation has been sustained by a hyper competition amongst retailers and fuelled by the commercial practices of the alcohol producers.

The solution to ending this alcohol fuelled epidemic of harms and death is the implementation of minimum pricing for alcohol products – a policy approach recommended by the WHO, whereby a floor price is introduced below which a fixed volume of alcohol cannot be sold to the public. MUP increases the price of only the cheapest alcohol. Numerous reviews of the scientific evidence have concluded that pricing policies are a highly effective measure to reduce alcohol related harm.

Having enacted the Public Health Alcohol Act, five years after the process had begun, we anticipated that the legislation would be implemented, in full. Sadly, for the thousands of people who have lost their lives since then, government has chosen not to implement the key measures.

This week we have again had the prospect that MUP will be commenced, with Ministers Donnelly and Feighan at the Department of Health, courageously leading on this initiative.

There have been a number of attempts to introduce MUP. However, on each occasion, choices have been made to protect commercial interests ahead of the greater public good.

This time we urge all those faced with approving this action to finally choose better public health outcomes.

Yours

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Frank Murray'.

PROF. FRANK MURRAY  
Chair

#### **Alcohol Health Alliance Ireland**

The Alcohol Health Alliance was established by Alcohol Action Ireland and the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland (RCPI), and brings together a wide range of public health campaigners whose mission is to reduce the harm caused by alcohol.

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