

Real or perceived impediments to minimum pricing of alcohol in Australia: public opinion, the industry and the law.

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Commentary

Real or perceived impediments to minimum pricing of alcohol in Australia: Public opinion, the industry and the law

Jenny Chalmers ^a ... Paula O'Connell ^d

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Abstract

A burgeoning body of empirical evidence demonstrates that increases in the price of alcohol can reduce per capita alcohol consumption and harmful drinking. Taxes on alcohol can be raised to increase prices, but this strategy can be undermined if the industry absorbs the tax increase and cross-subsidises the price of one alcoholic beverage with other products. Such loss-leading strategies are not possible with minimum pricing. We argue that a minimum (or floor) price for alcohol should be used as a *complement* to alcohol taxation. Several jurisdictions have already introduced minimum pricing (e.g., Canada, Ukraine) and others are currently investigating pathways to introduce a floor price (e.g., Scotland). Tasked by the Australian government to examine the public interest case for a minimum price, Australia's peak preventative health agency

recommended against setting one at the present time. The agency was concerned that there was insufficient Australian specific modelling evidence to make robust estimates of the net benefits. Nonetheless, its initial judgement was that it would be difficult for a minimum price to produce benefits for Australia at the national level. Whilst modelling evidence is certainly warranted to support the introduction of the policy, the development and uptake of policy is influenced by more than just empirical evidence. This article considers three potential impediments to minimum pricing: public opinion and misunderstandings or misgivings about the operation of a minimum price; the strength of alcohol industry objections and measures to undercut the minimum price through discounts and promotions; and legal obstacles including competition and trade law. The analysis of these factors is situated in an Australian context, but has salience internationally.



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Keywords

Minimum pricing; Alcohol; Australia

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