



A rapid narrative review

Minimum Unit Pricing

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Summary of Findings

Background

Minimum unit pricing (MUP) is a population level alcohol pricing policy that sets a floor price per unit of alcohol, targeting the cheapest products most consumed by people who drink heavily. International evidence has identified price-based policies as among the most effective measures for reducing alcohol consumption and related harms. In Australia, MUP was implemented in the Northern Territory (NT) in 2018 but repealed in 2025, prompting renewed interest in the overall strength of the evidence and its relevance for future policy decisions.

Methods

This rapid narrative review synthesised evidence published between 2010 and 2025, including six review studies and 18 additional empirical and modelling studies uncaptured in previous reviews. Eligible studies examined the impact of minimum pricing policies on alcohol consumption, alcohol-related harms and unintended consequences in Australia and comparable high income jurisdictions. Greater weight was given to quasi-experimental studies using objective outcomes, with modelling studies used to assess impacts under alternative policy scenarios.

Findings

Across study designs and settings, evidence consistently indicates that MUP reduces purchases of the cheapest alcohol and is associated with reductions in selected alcohol-related harms, particularly those linked to heavy drinking. Quasi-experimental studies from Scotland provide the strongest causal evidence, with convergent but more contextually confounded findings from the NT. Modelling studies suggest that impacts increase when minimum prices are set higher and maintained in real terms. Reductions in harms are most evident for chronic health outcomes and disproportionately benefit people who drink heavily and populations experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage. Evidence of large-scale unintended consequences is limited, although qualitative studies highlight potential risks for vulnerable subgroups.

Conclusion

Overall, there is moderate to strong evidence, and the balance of evidence supports MUP as an effective population level policy to reduce alcohol consumption and related harms, with the greatest benefits for those at highest risk. The extent of impact in Australia is likely to depend on policy design, interaction with existing alcohol controls and the inclusion of complementary supports for vulnerable populations.

Key messages

- MUP consistently reduces purchases of the cheapest alcohol, with effects concentrated among people who drink heavily and those most at risk of alcohol-related harm.
- The strongest causal evidence comes from quasi-experimental studies using objective data, supported by modelling studies showing that benefits increase when minimum prices are set higher and maintained over time.
- MUP has the potential to reduce alcohol-related harms and health inequities.

Summary of impacts by outcome

Outcome	Summary of evidence
Alcohol consumption	Consistent reductions observed in purchases of cheapest alcohol, particularly among heavy drinkers
Injury / acute harms	Mixed or limited evidence of short-term changes
Hospitalisations and health harms	Reductions observed, particularly for chronic alcohol-related conditions
Alcohol-related deaths	Reductions observed, stronger for chronic disease-related outcomes and among heavy drinkers
Violence / crime	Reductions observed, though attribution varies
Gender-based family violence	Some reductions observed, though attribution varies
Unintended consequences	Limited evidence; no consistent evidence of increased crime, substitution or displacement of essential spending (e.g. food)
Treatment and service use	Not systematically assessed, limited indirect evidence
Equity	Greater benefits for lower-income and high-risk groups
Tourism and other economic outcomes	Not a primary focus of studies included in this review

Key stats

- Results synthesised from 24 studies published in the last 15 years: 6 reviews and 18 additional primary empirical or modelling studies uncaptured in previous reviews.
- Consistent consumption effects: Scottish evaluations found around 2–4% reductions in off-premise alcohol sales, driven entirely by declines in the cheapest products.
- Disproportionate benefits: the heaviest drinkers account for most of the reduction in consumption, with minimal impacts on light/moderate drinkers and higher income groups.

Declarations

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