

How much alcohol would be affected by the introduction of a minimum unit price in Western Australia? Findings from an audit of alcohol retail prices.

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Introduction and Aims: The Western Australian (WA) Sustainable Health Review has prioritised the introduction of a minimum unit price (MUP) policy. This study aims to estimate the proportion of alcohol products that would potentially be affected by a MUP policy.

Method: Purposive sampling of the four largest off-premises alcohol retail chains and a further 10% random sample of other off-premise alcohol outlets in WA (n=35 outlets), and purposive sampling of on-premise inner city outlets (n=11). Product data was collected from outlets' public websites May-June 2021. Analysis focused on estimating the proportion of products priced at or below three hypothetical MUP levels ($\leq \$1.30$, $\leq \$1.50$ and $\leq \$1.75$ per standard drink).

Results: The audit included data on almost 28,000 products. At off-premise outlets, 6% of products were priced $\leq \$1.30$ per standard drink, with substantial differences by category: ready-to-drink (0.0%), spirits (<0.1%), beer (3%), wine (8%). Notably, 99% of cask wine products were priced $\leq \$1.30$ per standard drink, but these represent only 2% of total wine products. The estimated proportion of products priced at $\leq \$1.50$ and $\leq \$1.75$ per standard drink was 8% and 11%, respectively, and again relatively higher proportions of beer and wine products were affected. At on-premise outlets no products were priced $\leq \$1.75$ per standard drink.

Discussions and Conclusions: The study findings indicate zero or very small proportions of on-trade alcohol, off-premises ready-to-drink, and off-premises spirits would be affected by introducing a MUP in WA. Small proportions of off-trade wine and beer would potentially be affected by MUP. Cask wine was the only product category to be almost universally affected by the hypothetical MUP levels.

Implications for Practice or Policy: A MUP policy has potential to target the small proportion of alcohol sold at very low prices (i.e. cask wine), without affecting product prices across the majority of the alcohol market.

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