



3 December 2009

Dear Jackie Baillie MSP,

We are writing to you following your recent announcement that Scottish Labour will be establishing a commission to consider pricing policy measures under the leadership of Professor Sally Brown.

You will of course be aware that the medical, nursing and public health community in Scotland and the UK is deeply disappointed at Labour's comments on minimum pricing which are contrary to the view of all credible medical and scientific opinion. However, we welcome your recognition of the significant international evidence base linking alcohol price, consumption and harm and your interest in identifying effective pricing policy measures which could be implemented in Scotland.

We are writing to request a commitment from you that minimum pricing will be considered alongside any other pricing policy measures that the commission identifies as worthy of further examination. We are assuming that the commission's exploration of pricing mechanisms will include an assessment of the potential efficacy of any measure in reducing alcohol consumption and harm, as well as ease of implementation. You will no doubt be aware that the Scottish Medical Royal Colleges convened an expert workshop on the issue of alcohol price, policy and public health in 2007. The experts reviewed the international evidence and considered the pricing policy options open to government and concluded that minimum pricing in conjunction with alcohol taxation offered the most effective and cost-effective approach to reducing overall alcohol consumption and harm in Scotland. In the two years since the SHAAP price

report was published, all four UK Chief Medical Officers, the Welsh Assembly, the Health Minister for Northern Ireland and the World Health Organisation have similarly identified minimum pricing as a potentially effective policy measure open to government.

If the commission can identify any other pricing policy measures that can be demonstrated to offer the same benefits in terms of tackling the sale of cheap alcohol, reducing alcohol consumption and harm, and that would not require the investment of significant bureaucratic or financial resources, the medical, nursing and public health community would give any such measures careful consideration. By the same token, a commission that has been set up to explore effective pricing policy measures which does not consider minimum pricing would not be deemed credible by the medical, nursing and scientific community. We would similarly expect that the commission would report its findings prior to any vote being taken in the Scottish Parliament that could result in the removal of minimum pricing from the legislation currently under consideration.

The medical and public health community is proud of Labour's impressive public health record whilst in office. Being the first country in the UK to ban smoking in public places and inserting a public health objective into the Licensing (Scotland) Act are two measures that are regarded as ground-breaking by ourselves and our international colleagues. We hope that in opposition, Labour will show the same willingness to legislate in the public health interest.

We look forward to hearing your response.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Bruce Ritson
Chair, Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems

Professor Peter Brunt
Chair, Alcohol Focus Scotland

Professor Sir Neil Douglas
President, Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh

Dr Peter Rice
Chair, Royal College of Psychiatrists, Scottish Division

Dr Brian Keighley
Chair, BMA Scotland

Ms Eileen Frame
Chair, Royal College of Nursing Scotland

cc. Richard Simpson