



One in eight deaths in Europe between the ages of 15 and 64 is caused by alcohol

- **The damage caused by alcohol costs each European around 300€ every year**
- **To address this problem, the ALICE RAP network of over 150 scientists launches its policy brief on alcohol, calling for policy to promote health over industry interests**

Newcastle, Wednesday 16th May, 2012. Europe has a drinking problem. We drink more than twice the world's average and alcohol represents the number one addiction problem in Europe today, greater than any other drug or gambling, with around 1 in every 8 deaths amongst 15-64 year olds being due to alcohol. The first ALICE RAP policy brief on alcohol policy, launched at the project's general partner meeting in Newcastle this week, advocates evidence-based policy solutions to tackle this persistent addiction problem.

Alcohol is not just killing us, but costing us too: On top of spending on alcohol, alcohol costs European society about €300 per capita per year through reduced productivity and in costs to the health system, the welfare system and the criminal justice system. Scarce public funds are being stretched to cover these various costs: over-burdened health services to treat alcohol dependence and some 250 serious health problems caused by alcohol, such as cancer and liver disease; the costs to society and the criminal justice system of drunken violence and accidents; the costs to the welfare system of helping people whose lives have been ruined by alcohol to find their feet and start living again. European societies are also paying in terms of lost productivity from poor work performance of individuals with alcohol problems, not to mention those worried about them. These are costs we could well do without in times of economic austerity. In addition, new research findings suggest that drinkers are drinking far more than they actually enjoy, not to mention more than their bodies can cope with.

However, evidence-based alcohol policy could break the negative pattern of harmful consumption and associated costs. Recent scientific research shows that certain aspects of alcohol policy can successfully help whole populations reduce their alcohol consumption, heavy drinkers in particular, and thereby reduce the damage caused by alcohol. Economic models indicate that these policy options are also cost-effective.

European governments need a clear and un-biased view of the most up-to-date scientific research in this area, in order to choose the policy approach that will maximise their populations' health, wealth and happiness. The ALICE RAP policy brief, 'Alcohol – the neglected addiction', provides much needed scientific input to the discussion, which has long been dominated by alcohol industry lobbyists.

The most effective policy approaches, and also the fairest and most targeted, are those which nudge people towards consuming fewer grams of alcohol by moderating price and availability and by banning alcohol advertising. The minimum unit price proposed by the UK government is supported by research which shows that it brings about the highest reductions in consumption among those who are harming their health the most (i.e. those who most need to cut down). Regulation of alcohol-selling environments which modify availability can also encourage people to drink more moderately and result in better individual and population health, wealth and happiness. For example, reducing the number of outlets, the days and hours of sale, and the number of grams of alcohol in a packaged drink can save lives.

Finally, the ALICE RAP brief calls for a ban on alcohol advertising in all forms of mass media (print, broadcast and online). Studies show that alcohol adverts act subconsciously, increasing the amount consumed on drinking occasions and pushing people into more harmful bracket of alcohol consumption. Alcohol advertising also acts as an unfortunate trigger, causing people trying to recover from alcohol problems to relapse, and, in addition, it also has an impact on young people starting to drink. All of these facts explain, to some extent, the large amounts of money invested in advertising by the alcohol industry, and the effort that it has put into lobbying against such a ban.

Overall, European populations stand to reap huge benefits from science-based alcohol policy, in terms of health, wealth and well-being. And, according to the network of scientists in ALICE RAP, the time is ripe for this change.

About ALICE RAP

The ALICE RAP project (Addiction and Lifestyles in Contemporary Europe – Reframing Addictions Project) brings together a network of over 150 researchers who study many different aspects of addiction from a wide range of different disciplines. The network of scientists involved in the project includes some of the most renowned researchers in Europe from a wide variety of disciplines, ranging from biomedical fields which look at addiction, such as neurobiology, to economics, market forces, clinical services and social impact of addictive behaviour.

ALICE RAP will produce a series of policy papers with the aim of providing succinct scientific evidence briefs for decision-makers and advocates working on key addiction-related issues. The first of these briefs focuses on alcohol and was made public at the project's general partner meeting in Newcastle.

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