

EASL Position on EU Alcohol Policy

As the leading association of liver experts in Europe, the European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL) aims to promote increased awareness of and research about liver disease. We are also committed to playing our full role in the development of policy aimed at preventing liver disease.

Harmful alcohol consumption is now recognised as the 3rd biggest cause of early death and illness in the EU, just behind tobacco and high blood pressure.¹ With the increasing prevalence of liver cirrhosis and liver cancer in Europe, caused by excessive and chronic alcohol consumption, we believe it is EASL's responsibility to inform decision-makers of this worrying trend and to put forward evidence-based solutions that will contribute to tackling the problem.

EASL welcomes the World Health Organisation (WHO)'s efforts to establish a Global Strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol and the European Union's adoption of an EU Alcohol Strategy. We also look forward to the reinforcement of the EU's powers on alcohol under the Lisbon Treaty, which specifically provides for the development of "incentive measures" aimed at protecting public health against the abuse of alcohol (Article 168(5) TFEU) – and thereby provides a stronger impetus for European Union action on the abuse of alcohol than ever before.

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General principles

A. EASL confirms that alcohol is a major risk factor contributing to the growth of liver disease in Europe and of non-communicable diseases more widely.

B. EASL advocates for a reduction in alcohol-related disease, morbidity and mortality through a reduction in excessive and also chronic alcohol consumption.

C. EASL recognises that consumption of alcohol at an early age increases the risk of developing alcohol dependence and should therefore be prevented.

D. EASL recognises the close relationship between the affordability of alcohol and the prevalence of advanced liver disease.

E. EASL is campaigning for policies which result in a reduction of alcohol consumption not an outright ban. EASL strongly believes that manufacturers, retailers, the hospitality sector and others each have a role to play in reducing the harmful effects of alcohol through, inter alia, responsible marketing practices.

F. EASL recognises that the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty provides an opportunity to re-launch European action against the alcohol use disorders. We are committed to seizing this opportunity.

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¹ http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/alcohol/documents/alcohol_factsheet_en.pdf

EASL Recommendations on EU Alcohol Policy

1. The EU and its member states require an effective surveillance system to monitor the prevalence of alcohol-related liver disease and mortality.
2. The EU and its member states should commit to high profile, sustained health information and education campaigns to convey the dangers of excessive alcohol consumption, particularly in school and university environments
3. The EU and its member states should fund research into safe drinking limits and the impact on liver-related diseases
4. The EU and its member states should develop professional education and training campaigns targeted at primary and secondary care medical, nursing and associated professionals, as well as social workers and teachers to promote the early recognition of alcohol misuse
5. Advertising bans are an effective method of controlling consumption and EASL encourages the EU and its member states to ban the advertising of alcoholic beverages and the sponsorship of sporting, cultural and university events, as some member states have done or are considering
6. The EU and its member states should ban price-based promotion of alcoholic beverages (such as buy-one-get-one-free offers)
7. The EU and its member states should introduce health warnings on all alcoholic beverages, as is already the case in some member states
8. The EU should increase minimum excise duty rates on alcohol to deter consumption
9. The EU and its member states should increase investment in research on the impact of alcohol consumption on health as the cornerstone of an evidence-based alcohol policy
10. EU member states should strengthen the control of alcohol sales to underage individuals with effective penalties imposed on retailers who fail to comply with current laws