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LOW PRICE PROMOTIONS FUELLING INCREASED DRINKING SAYS BIG DRINK DEBATE

The biggest ever survey on alcohol in the North West has revealed that low price and discounts are fuelling our unhealthy drinking culture.

Of the 30,000 respondents, 80% said that they thought low price and discounts increased people's drinking.

This revealing statistic is taken from The Big Drink Debate carried out earlier in the year in a bid to understand why the region has one of the biggest alcohol problems in the country.

The results, published today also reveal that 75% of respondents believe that large measures are key to increased drinking; that 68% of respondents say allowing street drinking increases alcohol use and over half of respondents believe advertising (56%) and extended drinking hours (54%) are factors that increase drinking.

More than a quarter of respondents drink at harmful and hazardous levels, which suggests that more than a million people drink at this level across the North West, and that nearly half the respondents avoid town centres because of the drunken behaviour of others.

Launched by Our Life in partnership with Government Office North West and The Department of Health, the aim of The Big Drink Debate was to find out what people's views are on drinking and how it affects their health, safety and well being. Results are being presented today at a summit of public sector leaders from across the region.

Dr Alison Giles, Director of Our Life, said: "The results are staggering and as a region we should be asking ourselves – is it acceptable that alcohol can be so cheap when it is the cause of so much harm to us as individuals and as communities?"

The Big Drink Debate questionnaire was planned as a first response to the significant harm caused by the way we use alcohol in the North West. This is highlighted by the 73,000 crimes a year in the region (50,000 of them violent) which are linked to alcohol and one person being admitted to a North West hospital every seven minutes with an alcohol related condition.

Dr Giles added: "The next stage of the programme is to share our findings and to work together with our partners, industry and the general public to find new ways to shift this unhealthy culture."

Today's summit of North West leaders from across the North West will consider the results of the survey and the part each organisation could play in shifting our alcohol culture, whether through changes to personal behaviour, or changes to policy and regulation.

Dr Ruth Hussey, the Region's Director of Public Health, explained: "It is hugely important to listen to the public and the Big Drink Debate has given us an opportunity to do exactly that. We need to consider how best to use the information we have from the survey in order to create a healthier, safer North West."

Brenda Fullard, Public Health Specialist for Department of Health North West, added: "We are calling on our partners across the NHS, police, fire, local authorities and voluntary sectors to work together on a region-wide level to ensure that we reduce disease, disorder and deaths from alcohol harm in the short term and to support future generations to live long, healthy and safe lives."

Professor Bellis, Director of the North West Public Health Observatory, which analysed the results, said: "There is no such thing as a free drink. The real price the North West is paying for 'buy two get one free' and other cheap booze promotions is poorer health, more violence and, town and city centres seen by many as no-go areas at night.

"In the Big Drink Debate, four out of five people identified cheap alcohol and discounts as driving increasing alcohol consumption. Many people already understand the dangers that such increased drinking represents. The challenge now is convincing drinkers that consuming less and paying more is likely to improve their health and the prospects of the North West as a whole."

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NOTES TO EDITOR

1. 30,000 people responded to the Big Drink Debate survey between May and the end of August 2008.
2. Our Life has been established to offer creative ways for the NHS, local government, the public, business and voluntary organisations to work in partnership to make sure that the North West becomes one of the healthiest regions in the country.
3. The first campaign for Our Life is The Big Drink Debate - to find out how people in the North West feel about their health and what their views are on alcohol;
4. The North West has the worst drinking levels in the country for people drinking at hazardous or harmful levels;
5. Deaths from alcohol-related causes have doubled in a generation;

6. In the North West, around 43,000 men and 28,000 women are admitted to hospital every year for an alcohol-related condition. That's around one person every seven minutes;
7. More than 73,000 recorded crimes across the North West last year were related to alcohol – of these 50,000 were violent offences;
8. The estimated costs of alcohol-related and alcohol specific crime in England is £12billion;
9. The most deprived 20% of people in the North West suffer the effects of alcohol the most;
10. The questionnaire was compiled by the North West Public Health Observatory, who analysed the responses;
11. The Big Drink Debate is being funded by Our Life, the Department of Health and Government Office North West.