



Press release

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**SCIENTISTS URGE GOVERNMENT TO CALL TIME ON BRITAIN'S
EXCESSIVE DRINKING**

A group of the United Kingdom's leading medical researchers today warned of the increasing danger to individuals' health from the growing consumption of alcohol and the spiralling costs of alcohol-related illness to the NHS. The Academy of Medical Sciences working group called on Government to introduce strategies to prevent any further rise in alcohol consumption and to bring levels back to those of 1970.

The Academy's Report '*Calling Time*' shows the link between the growing overall level of alcohol consumption – up by 50 per cent in the United Kingdom since 1970 – and the problems associated with individuals' heavy drinking. The Report argues therefore, that to address the challenge of alcohol related harm in individuals, society has to address general levels of alcohol consumption in the community as a whole. It is not sufficient to target heavy drinkers.

The Report reaffirms that moderate alcohol consumption by men over 40 and post-menopausal women can play a part in reducing the risk of heart attack and strokes. However, growing alcohol consumption in the United Kingdom is responsible for a range of damaging problems including:

- 70 per cent of cirrhosis deaths, which have increased nine times among young men and women since 1970;
- 150,000 admissions to hospitals each year;
- up to a third of all accident and emergency cases.

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The scientists then go on to call for a national debate about alcohol related harm and list a number of preventative policy options including:

- increasing taxes on alcoholic beverages to restore the affordability levels of 1970, when they were more expensive relative to disposable income;
- reducing travellers' allowances in the EU from current maximum levels which give a heavy drinker a 272 day supply of wines and spirits, to a level which gives a 40 day supply;
- tightening drink-drive countermeasures including lowering the maximum blood alcohol level, and stricter enforcement;
- a review of the advertising of alcoholic beverages;
- better education and further medical research on the damaging effects of excessive alcohol consumption.

The Chairman of the Academy's Working Party, Professor Sir Michael Marmot of University College London commented, 'The pleasure alcohol brings has to be balanced against the harms. A strategic programme is needed now to curb the nation's escalating level of drinking in the interests of both individual and public health. The country has reached a point where it is necessary and urgent to call time on runaway alcohol consumption.'

Copies of the Report, '*Calling Time: The Nation's drinking as a major health issue*' are available from The Academy of Medical Sciences, 10 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5AH, tel.: 020 7969 5288.

The independent Academy of Medical Sciences promotes advances in medical science and public health and campaigns to ensure these are translated as quickly as possible into benefits for society. The Academy's 750 Fellows are the United Kingdom's leading medical scientists from hospitals, academia, industry and the public service.

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2. The report was supported by the Society for the Study of Addiction <http://www-users.york.ac.uk/~sjp22/addiction/index.htm>