

## UK faces growing alcohol tab

Britain's heavy drinkers are costing their country £20 billion per year in health care costs and economic losses, a new report says ([www.number10.gov.uk/files/pdf/SU%20interim\\_report2.pdf](http://www.number10.gov.uk/files/pdf/SU%20interim_report2.pdf)).

The government-sponsored report found that "average drinkers" today are ingesting 150% more alcohol than their counterparts did 50 years ago, and that Britons are among the worst binge drinkers in Europe. (Binge drinking is defined as the consumption over a short period of at least 4 pints of beer [or their equivalent] for men or 3 pints [or their equivalent] for women.)

The report says British men participate in binge drinking 40% of the time they consume alcohol, women 22%.

Britons are also starting to drink — and drink more heavily — at a younger age. The legal drinking age is 18, but the report says many people aged 16 to 24 are drinking heavily. It also says there has been a 70% increase in alcohol abuse among young British women.

The report says alcohol use is a factor in 22 000 deaths and 1.2 million violent incidents annually in the UK, and it lands 150 000 people in hospital each year. Alcohol-related illnesses and injuries cost the NHS £1.7 billion annually, while alcohol-related crime costs £7.3 billion. Absenteeism and reduced productivity due to excess alcohol consumption costs an estimated £4.6 billion annually, with another £4.7 million

needed to cover the human and social costs. The study estimates that 800 000 to 1.3 million school-age children are affected by their parents' drinking.

However, Britain's £30-billion drinks industry also provides an estimated 1 million jobs and generates £7 billion in tax revenue. Rob Hayward, CEO of the British Beer and Pub Association, criticized the study's definition of binge drinking, noting that "on this measure, nearly 1 in 5 male pensioners is a binge drinker."

The government would like to see British drinkers imitate the French and Italians. They tend to consume alcohol at mealtimes, and in smaller quantities. — *Mary Helen Spooner, West Sussex, UK*

### PULSE

## Diabetes' rising toll

The prevalence of diabetes in Canada is increasing. Data from a 6-year comparison of the National Population Health Surveys and Canadian Community Health Surveys indicate that the proportion of Canadians with the disease rose from 3.4% in 1994/95 to an estimated 4.5% in 2000/01. The

rate for men increased to 4.8% from 3.4%, while the rate for women rose to 4.2% from 3.3%.

The disease's incidence increased with age. Those in the 18-to-44 age group had 1.8 new cases per 1000 person-years at risk, but this rose to 14.2 cases for Canadians 75 or older. Age

also continued to be a significant factor after controlling for factors such as family history, weight, physical activity, drinking, smoking and education.

For people with a family history of diabetes, the 6-year incidence rate was 9.7 new cases per 1000 person-years at risk, compared with 3 cases for those with no family history.

Obese and overweight Canadians are at greater risk. The 6-year incidence rate for obese people was 13.5 new cases per 1000 person-years at risk, compared with 6.1 for those who were overweight and 1.9 for those who were not overweight.

The data also point to a link between physical activity and diabetes, with an incidence of 5.8 new cases per 1000 person-years at risk for sedentary individuals, compared with only 2.7 new cases for those who are active.

Smoking and education, when adjusted for other factors, were not significantly related to incidence of the disease. — *Tara S. Chaudan, Project Manager, Research, Policy and Planning, CMA*

Prevalence of diabetes in Canada - 1994/95–2000/01

