

To Do More and Better Regarding Portugal's Alcohol Consumption, a Social Change Is Needed

Fazer Mais e Melhor Relativamente ao Consumo de Álcool em Portugal Implica uma Mudança Social

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Dear Editor,

In June 2022, your journal published a letter to the editor entitled "Alcohol Consumption in Portugal: We Need to Do More"¹ addressing the pressing challenge of alcohol consumption control in our country. We congratulate the author for emphasizing the importance of primary prevention measures implemented within the scope of simple counselling in primary health care (PHC), recognizing them as fundamental strategies.

Using a screening tool followed by simple counselling, a brief intervention and treatment referral based on the severity of alcohol use problems are early and cost-effective actions, especially in PHC.² Despite this, due to several barriers, the practice has not yet been systematized and integrated into the routine of healthcare professionals in Portugal, with only a few experimental cases and best practices being available.

Therefore, we highlight that an effective approach to addressing alcohol-related problems requires considering and including public policies in the domain of primordial prevention, which are aimed at protecting the health and well-being of the population exposed to alcoholic beverages. There is a need to raise taxes and restrict access, availability, and marketing of these products.³ Several countries have adopted these measures, as recommended by both the World Health Organization (WHO) and international experts, but national governments and institutions face challenges in fully implementing them. Economic influences, playbook

strategies and lobbying of the alcohol industry may be contributing to this resistance and vulnerability.⁴

Since a safe level of alcohol consumption does not seem to exist, its consumption should not be recommended.⁵ For decades, alcohol has been recognized as a carcinogen, associated with seven types of cancer, including breast cancer. At a population level, it is associated with an increased risk of major non-communicable chronic diseases, as well as an increased risk of suicide, violence, and crime, disproportionately affecting disadvantaged populations and promoting greater social and economic disparity.

Maximizing the availability of screening, counseling, referral, and treatment, as well as training healthcare professionals, are the priorities of the current European Action Plan on Alcohol, which is aligned with the WHO's SAFER initiative. However, advocating for political measures for social change is even more important. An example of this is the debate taking place in the European Union on labeling and placing warnings on alcoholic beverages, which is facing opposition from political circles in Portugal. The consumers' right to information should be supported and implemented by public health entities.

So, what should be done regarding alcohol consumption in Portugal? We need indeed to do more and better.

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All authors contributed equally to this manuscript and approved the final version to be published.

COMPETING INTERESTS

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