

## **Let's stop the loss of life and billions in damage: dozens of experts call on politicians to limit alcohol availability**

*Prague, 7 April 2025* - Experts today presented a Call to Action to politicians to protect public health and limit the availability of alcohol. This was on the occasion of World Health Day. The experts are responding to the alarming impact of excessive alcohol consumption in the Czech Republic and offering concrete solutions based on data and proven international practice. The main initiators are the think tanks Minister of Health and Rational Policies on Addictions together with the Czech branch of the WHO. A total of 25 renowned institutions, primarily in the field of health care, prevention or addictionology, including the Czech Medical Chamber, supported the Challenge.

*"In the Czech Republic, unfortunately, we are among the world leaders in alcohol consumption. Every year, 6 to 7 thousand people die in connection with its use, tens of thousands of hospitalisations occur, and the damage also affects our economy. The costs associated with alcohol use are around 40 to 50 billion a year, which was confirmed by a recent study by the Minister of Health,"* said Tomáš Šebek, a doctor and founder of the Minister of Health think tank, adding that alcohol is also a threat to children and adolescents - almost half of high school students report excessive drinking. It also contributes to crime, domestic violence and family breakdown.

*"The statistics are alarming, but we must remember that behind each of these numbers are real people and real lives. Most of us have someone in our family, friends or circle of acquaintances in whose fate alcohol has played a negative role. We have seen first-hand the devastating effects it can have on an individual and their environment. We can never completely prevent stories like this from happening, but we can at least reduce their frequency. That is our main goal,"* emphasized Šebek.

*"This year's World Health Day reminds us that healthy beginnings create a hopeful future. In the Czech Republic, where alcohol is widely available and socially tolerated, preventing alcohol use in pregnancy is a major public health challenge. This Challenge is an important step towards creating a healthier environment from the very beginning of life - and a strong investment in the health of future generations,"* described Zsófia Pusztai, Head of the WHO Office in the Czech Republic.

*"Despite the fact that alcohol is a de facto hard drug due to its safety profile, it is widely tolerated in Czech society, even when consumed by children. Therefore, it is important to gradually change the social perception of alcohol, for example by introducing stricter regulation of advertising for alcoholic beverages or society-wide campaigns, similar to tobacco products,"* said Petr Pleva, a member of the board of directors of the Rational Addiction Policy Think Tank, adding that other proposed measures can also contribute to reducing alcohol consumption and thus improving public health. *"These include changing the design of the excise tax so that its amount reflects the percentage of alcohol in the drink, limiting the availability of alcohol in self-service outlets and at night. It is also important to improve law enforcement,"* Pleva explained.

*"The fact that the issue of alcohol is a really pressing topic is confirmed by the fact that a total of 25 renowned institutions have supported the Challenge. For example, the Czech Medical Chamber, the*

*National Institute of Mental Health, the Czech Association of Addictionologists and Providers of Addiction Services, the National Association of Patient Organisations, the Czech Pharmacy Chamber, PAQ Research, the Czech Sokol Community and many others have joined our initiative, which we greatly appreciate. We all offer a helping hand to politicians and will be happy to work together on solutions to improve health and quality of life in our country. We sent this offer together with the Challenge to the Prime Minister and eight key ministries at the end of last week,"* described Kateřina Hellebrandová, Director of the think tank Minister of Health.

According to her, there are plans to organize a round table on the topic, to which both experts, signatories of the Challenge and representatives of political parties will be invited. *"Health is in the interest of all of us without distinction,"* Hellebrand concluded.

The call to protect public health and limit the availability of alcohol was sent to Prime Minister Petr Fiala, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Industry and Trade and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. It was also sent to the Ministries of Education, Agriculture, Interior and Transport, as well as to the Government Council for Public Health.