



**EUROPEAN ALCOHOL POLICY  
CONFERENCE  
BUILDING CAPACITY FOR ACTION  
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**The ethics of alcohol policy**

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The Nuffield Council on Bioethics recently published a report 'Public health: ethical issues', which considers the ethical and social issues arising when designing measures to improve public health. The report concluded that the state has a duty to help people lead a healthy life and to reduce inequalities. It proposes a 'stewardship model', which outlines how this can be justified and achieved, and an 'intervention ladder' as a tool for assessing the acceptability of different public health measures.

The report uses a number of case studies to illustrate the discussion, including that of alcohol. Alcohol-related public health policies raise significant ethical issues, including in relation to whether alcohol consumption is purely a matter of personal 'choice', what rationales are acceptable to encourage people to change their behaviour, the role of industry, and the role of evidence in policies in these areas.

Drawing on the stewardship model and intervention ladder, the Council suggests how ethically-justifiable policy could be developed. We make a number of recommendations in this area in relation to the role of the state and of industry.