Reviewer's report

Title: The opportunities for and obstacles against prevention: the example of Germany in the area of tobacco and alcohol

Version: 2 Date: 13 July 2010

Reviewer: Steve Allsop

Reviewer's report:

This is a great improvement on the original paper.

I have some minor suggestions and one more substantive one.

Minor

1. Suggest that the title read: the example of Germany in the areas of tobacco and alcohol (ie plural areas, not singular)

2. Perhaps sentence 4 on page 3 could be redone - use of "different" five times in one sentence

3. Bottom page 3, last line - "substantial change will not take place"??
   Perhaps better to say "substantial change will be hampered"??

4. page 5, 5 lines from bottom - take out the word "even" so it reads "... for women is the highest in the EU".

More significant issues (but readily addressed)

1. page 10, last para - why is it important to have country-specific studies? I understand the reason why, it is implicit in this para but the authors should make explicit why this is the case.

2. page 11 bottom. I think it is relevant to consider what might bring individuals and the community on side. For example, people may tolerate distal adverse outcomes that do not have personal relevance, but may be more tolerant of more immediate, personally relevant adverse outcomes.

So, for example, we may generate more support for alcohol policies if there is concern about how public drunkenness that reduces perceived personal safety and public amenity than we might if we focus on cirrhosis - which might not happen to me and is something that happens "down the track" - ie much later. I think this is illustrated in the way the evidence about passive smoking gave such a momentum to smoking interventions. So the message for public health advocates is how do we help individuals recognise that current patterns of use have personal relevance for them, how change will improve things and how it is possible to embrace change at low personal cost. (this also fits Kingdon's model about solutions that are attractive and feasible in response to clearly identified
problems.
Hope these comments are helpful