

## World No Tobacco Day: Time for governments to phase out cigarette sales

**31 May 2021**

This World No Tobacco Day, 148 health organisations have signed an open letter calling on governments to work towards phasing out commercial cigarette sales.

Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) and The University of Queensland School of Public Health were both signatories to the letter.

Menzies senior research fellow Dr Marita Hefler said it was time to begin planning for a world after tobacco.

“Cigarettes are uniquely dangerous. No other product that causes early death when used exactly as intended is allowed to remain available for sale,” Dr Hefler said.

“Treating cigarettes as a normal consumer product is a relic of the past - when the dangers of smoking were not well understood.”

New Zealand recently released a draft tobacco action proposal which includes a raft of proposals to help the country achieve its smoke-free goal.

It includes banning filters (a major cause of plastic pollution), drastically reducing the number of outlets allowed to sell tobacco and reducing nicotine content in cigarettes to non-addictive levels.

The proposal also includes a plan to phase out sales through a smoke-free generation strategy, which would see the legal purchase age of cigarettes increase annually so that people born after a certain year will never be legally sold cigarettes.

If New Zealand implements these proposals, it will join other international jurisdictions which recently took steps to end cigarette sales, including several city councils in the United States and the Netherlands. The latter is phasing out sales from supermarkets and petrol stations from 2024.

The University of Queensland School of Public Health Associate Professor Coral Gartner said that Australia has been a global leader in reducing smoking.

“We were the first country to introduce cigarette plain packaging and our hard-hitting public awareness campaigns about the dangers of smoking, graphic warning labels, tobacco taxes and smoke-free areas have reduced smoking to historically low levels,” said Dr Gartner.

“It is time for cigarettes to be treated the same way as other equally dangerous products like asbestos, and leaded paint and petrol.”

Studies show most smokers would like to quit smoking. Reducing the number of outlets where cigarettes are sold will help reduce impulse purchases of cigarettes while quitting.

The Australian government is facilitating access to a wider range of cigarette alternatives from October through the nicotine vaping on prescription program, so there will be additional assistance for people who need it and options for those who wish to continue using nicotine.

As smoking continues to decline, inevitable impacts on retailers and government tax revenue will be felt.

Both retailers and government need to prepare for a future which doesn't rely on people continuing to use a lethal product to generate revenue. Having a clear end date to plan for this is important for everyone.

While current approaches to reducing smoking have been very successful, a substantial number of Australians still smoke daily, and smoking-related harms disproportionately impact some population groups.

Changing the tobacco supply system is likely to produce more equitable reductions in smoking across society compared to current approaches alone.

The Australian government recently consulted on a draft National Preventive Health Strategy, which included a target to slash smoking to less than five per cent of the population by 2030.

However, such ambitious goals are unlikely to be achieved without strategies that go beyond 'business as usual'.

Additional public consultation on specific policy options to achieve this goal is needed to identify which strategies have the greatest support to reduce the retail availability of cigarettes.

More information:

- Read the letter and view signatories here: <https://ash.org/aftertobacco/>
- 'Commit to quit': a goal for all, not only individual tobacco users. Editorial in May edition of BMJ Tobacco Control: <https://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/30/3/239>

ENDS

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**Menzies School of Health Research**

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