



Inquiry into what should be done to create a smoke-free generation of young New Zealanders by 2020

Recommendation

The Health Committee makes the following recommendations to the Government:

- Tax increases should continue to be implemented as an effective tool to reduce smoking uptake, increase cessation attempts, and decrease consumption.
- Tobacco displays should be banned.
- Plain packaging should be introduced for all tobacco products. The placement of an ingredient list on all packaging for tobacco products should be investigated.
- Cessation services should be funded and promoted, and nicotine replacement therapy products should be widely available at low cost.
- A licensing system for tobacco outlets should be investigated.

Introduction

Tobacco smoking is the single biggest preventable cause of early death in New Zealand. Around 5,000 New Zealanders die from diseases caused by smoking every year, including 350 deaths from the effects of second-hand smoke. The costs of smoking in New Zealand were estimated to be around \$1.7 billion in 2005. The Ministry of Health told us that 80 percent of smokers would not take it up if they were able to make the choice, and that most smokers want to give up smoking.

The overall rates of smoking have declined over the past few decades. We acknowledge that young people lead the trend of being non-smokers. In the 2007/08 period smoking rates among 14- and 15-year-olds fell by 2 percent. Yearly surveys conducted by Action on

Smoking and Health indicate that 87 percent of 14- and 15-year-olds do not smoke, compared with 80 percent of adults.

We are concerned that a higher percentage of young Māori (especially Māori girls), homosexual youth, and Pacific young people smoke than the remainder of the youth population. The Ministry of Health told us that it is difficult to determine particular reasons why these groups are more likely to smoke tobacco. We were interested to hear that smoking and other health risk factors, including obesity and alcohol abuse, are more prevalent in disadvantaged socioeconomic groups.

Age of uptake

Preventing young people from taking up smoking lowers the risk that they will start smoking in the future. A New Zealand survey in 2008 established that the average age at which 18- to 19-year-olds first tried smoking was around 13 years old. For Māori, the average age of uptake is even lower, at around 11 years old. Very few people start smoking after reaching the age of 21.

Tobacco taxes

Increasing the price of tobacco products is an effective tool to discourage young people from smoking, as they tend to respond more to price increases than to educational campaigns. Published research shows that an increase in the price of cigarettes causes a significant reduction in the youth smoking rates.

Some of us consider that increasing the price of tobacco products will have unfair repercussions. People in disadvantaged socioeconomic groups, who are more likely to smoke, will be penalised for their addiction. The majority of us felt, however, that the health benefits that are likely to result from tax increases outweigh the economic disadvantages.

Marketing tobacco to young people

We were concerned to hear that tobacco companies deliberately target their marketing towards teenagers. By targeting teenagers the companies aim to capture life-long customers. We were particularly concerned that some tobacco companies target young women's vulnerabilities about their body weight, by presenting their products as weight loss aids.

Brand recognition

Tobacco products are widely available in New Zealand from a variety of outlets. Product displays encourage purchase and also familiarise young people with brands, which is a risk factor for experimenting with smoking.

Restricting the promotion of tobacco products has been recognised internationally as an important tobacco control mechanism. The impact of tobacco displays in retail outlets on both smoking initiation and reducing the success of attempts to give up has been documented. In a 2008 survey of 14- and 15-year-olds more than half of the young people either agreed or strongly agreed with the idea that children would be less likely to smoke if shops were banned from displaying tobacco products.

The packaging of tobacco products is an important part of tobacco companies' marketing. By mandating that all tobacco products be marketed in plain packaging, consumers would be prevented from forming relationships with tobacco brands. A survey conducted in 2008 found that most people support the imposition of plain packaging. We feel that it is important that the graphic illustrations of the negative health effects of smoking remain on the packaging.

Additives

We were advised that tobacco companies often add sweet ingredients to their products, including chocolate, honey and sugar, to mask the taste. This produces a taste that is likely to appeal to more people, but especially to young people.

We were advised that many chemicals, including a substance commonly used in toilet cleaner, are added to cigarettes. We consider that the provision of an ingredient list on tobacco product packaging would give consumers valuable information and might prevent some people from taking up smoking.

Helping smokers to stop smoking

All of the experts we consulted advised us that tobacco is the problem, not smokers. Tobacco products contain nicotine, a highly addictive substance, so smokers need support to give up. The average smoker endures 14 attempts before giving up successfully.

The provision of cessation services has been proven to have an impact on smokers' ability to give up. Evidence shows that an increased number of people use the services when they are promoted widely. The use of nicotine replacement therapy as an aid roughly doubles a smoker's chances of being able to give up smoking.

Licensing retail outlets

We were told that there is one tobacco outlet in New Zealand for every 80 smokers, and that this is because there is no regulation of tobacco supply. Anecdotally, young people under the age of 18 can easily buy tobacco products in New Zealand. A licensing system for tobacco retailers has the potential to improve the monitoring and control of tobacco product supply. It could also facilitate the enforcement of age-related restrictions on the sale of tobacco. It would promote the attitude that selling tobacco is a privilege, not a right.

Other countries, including Singapore and Iceland, have instituted licensing for tobacco retailers, and its introduction has been associated with decreases in smoking prevalence and uptake. It has also been linked with improved retailer compliance with laws restricting young people from buying tobacco products.

Appendix

Committee procedure

The committee met on 6 and 7 July 2010 to consider the inquiry. The committee heard evidence from the Ministry of Health, the Health Sponsorship Council Smokefree, the Ministry of Youth Development, and the Smokefree Coalition.

Committee members

Turei-Hamiora Ormsby (Chairperson)

Tay-Jana Brown

Joseph Chamberlain

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Edward McKnight

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