

Tobacco

FACTS

For MPs

Tobacco: more action needed to reduce spiralling health costs

The looming crisis over our ageing population and rising health care costs could be relieved with greater investment in preventive measures – including smoking, says a recent report from the Productivity Commission[#]. The Road to Recovery Report^{*} into substance abuse and the Treasurer's Intergenerational Report also call for a stronger commitment – including a reorientation of our health care system towards prevention and lower smoking rates in particular.

Health and medical leaders are calling on Federal MPs to support:

- A boost in government funding to fully implement the new National Tobacco Strategy (NTS) 2004-09 as \$2m a year for anti smoking campaigns is not enough to do the job. See Blue Chip submission at www.vctc.org.au
- Establishment of an expert group to co-ordinate the NTS.
- Strengthening the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act 1992 that is yet to be considered by Parliament – even though the review was announced on 31 May 2002.

[#] Economic implications of an ageing Australia at www.pc.gov.au/study/ageing/draftreport/

^{*} Road to Recovery report at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/fca-sec.6_recs_43-49



December 2004

ACCC's long delay over tobacco inquiry

An investigation by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission into misleading and deceptive labels claiming cigarettes are "mild" or "light" may not see the light of day because of lack of funding. Its now over three years since Senator Lyn Allison with ALP support proposed (21/9/01) that the commission conduct an investigation into allegations that tobacco companies had misled and deceived consumers. In the meantime, costs of tobacco have been reported as increasing from \$12b a to \$21b a year, and new graphic warnings on tobacco products have been downsized and delayed until March 2006.

Tobacco prevention: \$2 saved for every \$1 invested...

New findings quantifying the returns on preventive health measures have identified smoking prevention as extremely cost-effective, saving the federal government \$344 million – or \$2 for every \$1 spent on anti-smoking programs – over the last three decades.

"Returns on Investment in Public Health" (2003), Dept of Health and Ageing, pp.30-31.



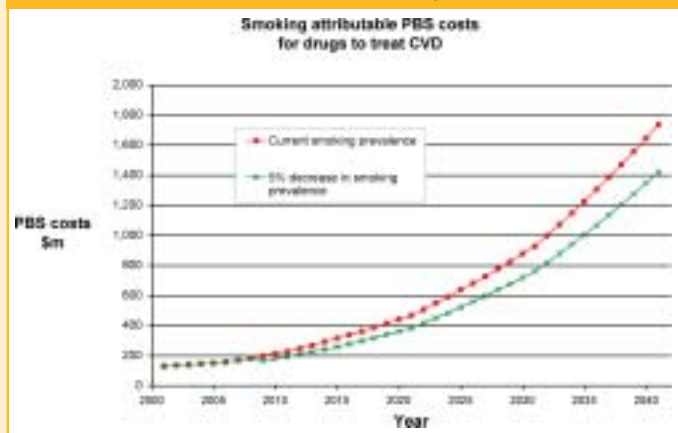
REDUCING SMOKING RATES WILL SAVE HEALTH COST BLOWOUT

A leading Australian health economist has warned that unless smoking rates fall, long-term drug subsidies to treat smoking-related heart disease will blow out from the present \$126m pa to \$1.7b by the year 2041.

A study led by Assoc Prof Susan Hurley, in the Medical Journal of Australia, says a 5% fall in smoking rates would save \$4.5b over the next 40 years. This could be achieved by increased funding for anti-smoking advertising campaigns.

Hurley, S et al, "The potential for tobacco control to reduce PBS costs for smoking-related cardiovascular disease" (Sept 2004), in MJA 181: 252-255. www.mja.com.au/public/issues/181_05_060904/contents_060904.html

A 5% CUT IN SMOKING WOULD SAVE \$4.5b OVER 40 YEARS



An information bulletin for MPs from Australia's leading health organisations:



Tobacco Facts for MPs



Plan for self-extinguishing cigarettes

As fire season blazes into full force, state government demands are growing for a national law requiring all cigarettes to be

self-extinguishing – as part of a broader regulatory framework – to reduce costs of bush and house fires caused by discarded cigarettes. The facts:

- Smouldering cigarettes cost lives and an estimated \$80m in damages.
See Monograph No.49, National Drug Strategy 2002, p.31
- About 7% of bushfires are estimated to be caused by cigarettes.
- Fire authority data show that at least 4574 fires a year are caused by smoking around Australia.
- A recent study showed that the addition of citrate to cigarette paper appears to be the key ingredient that keeps cigarettes burning down to the butt when not inhaled. Elimination of burning agents would simply and dramatically reduce the ignition propensity of cigarettes.
- Canada and New York have legislation requiring cigarettes to have reduced ignition propensity.

More at MJA 2004; 181 (6): 292-293 at www.mja.com.au/public/issues/181_06_200904/cha10373_fm.html

Smoking costs are triple those of illicit drugs

"Tobacco abuse" is costing Australia a staggering \$21b a year – more than \$1000 per person. Latest research from the National Drug Strategy confirms that each year tobacco:

- kills more than 19,000 Australians (more than 80% of all drug-related deaths);
- costs the nation over \$21b in health care, business and other costs (more than 60% of all drug-related costs); including
- bill to Australian business of more than \$2.5b a year in loss of productive labour – not including "smoko" breaks.

Although the report says 40% of these costs are avoidable, gradual declines in smoking have led to a view that "enough has been done". As a result, funding for anti-smoking education remains low compared with other public health campaigns, and with other OECD countries: USA, NZ, Canada and Ireland all spend more than 3x per capita what Australia spends on tobacco control.

Monograph No.49, National Drug Strategy 2002; at www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/publicat/document/mono49.pdf

See also health groups' "Tobacco Control: A Blue Chip Investment" (2001) at www.vctc.org.au

205,000 KIDS SMOKING WEEKLY

New research shows stronger government action is needed to protect children from smoking – with a new government survey* showing 205,000 school students smoking weekly.

Health groups have called for urgent national government action to get tobacco out of sight in retail outlets and to implement a uniform registration scheme for all tobacco sellers. **

The National Drug Strategy survey showed 205,259 students are currently smoking at least weekly. 24% of these smokers had bought cigarettes from retail outlets.

Health leaders are seeking support for:

- imposing a one cent levy per cigarette to fund mass media education campaigns;
- a uniform licensing scheme for tobacco retailers;
- an end to tobacco product displays in shops; and
- better support services for smokers.

Smoking Behaviours of Australian Secondary Students 200* at www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/pdf/mono54.pdf

See ASH factsheet "Tobacco Facts for Retailers" at www.ashaust.org.au/pdfs/TFacRetail0411.pdf

MPs HOLD KEY TO HELPING SMOKERS

- A special edition of the *Medical Journal of Australia* has pointed to cutting smoking rates as a key to reduce social inequities in chronic disease in Australia. Articles highlight socio-economic, ethnic and gender differences in incidence and seriousness of cardiovascular disease, stroke, chronic respiratory conditions, cancer, diabetes, renal and other diseases strongly tobacco-linked. The journal says "the health of the population as a whole will be greatly improved if politicians find the will to do far more to reduce smoking..."
MJA (September 1, 2003) 179(5)
- New measures flagged by Federal and State governments (including out-of-sight sales, a ban on misleading terms like "Light" and "Mild", and graphic packet warnings) will be much more effective if funding of anti-smoking campaigns is brought up to realistic levels.
- New moves to reduce smoking are often resisted by tobacco-friendly interests claiming that measures will hurt the economy and cost jobs. Not so, says a detailed economic study by Macquarie and Queensland University economists. The report, commissioned by The Cancer Council NSW, says a 25% drop in prevalence across the State would be of most help to the poorest households, who spend 18% of their income on tobacco products compared to 3% spent by wealthier families. And measures to cut smoking would have minimal cost on the economy as a whole.

Junor et al for Cancer Council NSW (June 2004) at www.cancercouncil.com.au/editorial.asp?pageid=1891&fromsearch=yes

...and a vote-winner ✓

Governments have been urged to catch up with growing public support for reducing tobacco harm, following survey results. The 2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey of 27,000 Australians over 14 years of age shows strong public support for harm-reduction measures – including:

- 91.2% support stricter law enforcement of illegal tobacco sales to children;
- 85.3% want smoking banned in shopping centres; and
- 60% support making it harder to buy tobacco in shops.

AIHW, "2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey" Ch. 4, p. 34 at www.aihw.gov.au/ndshs/index.html

GOOD NEWS



AUSTRALIA EMBRACES WORLD TOBACCO-CONTROL LAW NOW IN FORCE

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing, Christopher Pyne, announced on 5 November that the Australian Government has ratified the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control of the World Health Organization (WHO). The treaty will now be binding on ratifying nations.

Health groups congratulated the Australian government for its leading role in the development of the treaty to curb the growing tobacco epidemic worldwide. Signatory nations are committed to meeting minimum global standards on tobacco price and tax increases, tobacco advertising, sponsorship, labelling, illicit trade and second-hand smoke.

See the treaty and current signatories at www.who.int/tobacco/framework/en/

More info: www.ashaust.org.au or phone (02) 9334 1823