



Australian Government
Department of Health

Sensitive: Legal

INFORMATION BRIEF

MINISTER: Nash

ADVISER: Tahlia Robertson

FURTHER TOBACCO STATISTICS RELATING TO QTB 17-04

Issue

New research published in the Medical Journal of Australia in January 2014 demonstrates a significant and sustained increase in calls to the Quitline in NSW and the ACT following the introduction of tobacco plain packaging.

Key Facts

Recent research on the impact of Australia's tobacco plain packaging measure

- Research funded by the Cancer Institute NSW and published in the Medical Journal of Australia on 13 January 2014¹, sought to examine behavioural change resulting from the introduction of tobacco plain packaging.
 - The study found a 78 per cent increase in the number of calls to the smoking cessation helpline, Quitline, in NSW and the ACT following the introduction of tobacco plain packaging¹. This peak occurred four weeks after the initial appearance of plain packaging, and has been prolonged.
 - Although the same relative increase in calls to the Quitline was found in 2006 after the introduction of graphic health warnings on tobacco product packaging, the new study found that the impact of tobacco plain packaging has continued for longer.
 - The study controlled for the effects of other known influences on quitting behaviour and use of the Quitline: anti-tobacco advertising activity, the costliness of tobacco products, the number of smokers in the community, and seasonal peaks in calls to the Quitline that are observed in the New Year period.
 - The increase in calls was not attributable to anti-tobacco advertising activity, cigarette price increases, nor other identifiable causes.
- This research is evidence of immediate and actual behaviour change following the introduction of tobacco plain packaging, demonstrating that people are taking action to obtain support to quit smoking.
- Its findings complement earlier research conducted by the Cancer Council Victoria in November 2012, and published in the BMJ Open journal on 23 July 2013², which found that plain packaged cigarettes with larger health warnings increased smokers' urgency to quit and lowered the appeal of smoking.
 - The Cancer Council Victoria survey was undertaken during the roll-out phase of the tobacco plain packaging legislation, when both plain and branded packs were available. It showed that compared with branded pack smokers, those who were smoking from plain packs:
 - perceived their cigarettes to be lower in quality;
 - tended to perceive their cigarettes as less satisfying than a year ago;
 - were more likely to have thought about quitting at least once a day in the past week; and
 - to rate quitting as a higher priority in their lives.

¹ Young J M, Stacey I, Dobbins T A, Dunlop S, Dessaix A L, and Currow D L. Association between tobacco plain packaging and Quitline calls: a population-based, interrupted time series analysis. *Med J Aust* 2014; 200 (1):29-32. https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2014/200/1/association-between-tobacco-plain-packaging-and-quitline-calls-population-based?ip_login_no_cache%3D6f8f5de648dfcce2718715b50264601

² Wakefield MA, Hayes L, Durkin S, Borland R. Introduction effects of the Australian plain packaging policy on adult smokers: a cross-sectional study. *BMJ Open* 2013; 3: e003175. <http://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/3/7/e003175.full>

- Tobacco plain packaging operates as part of a comprehensive range of tobacco control measures. It is an investment in the long term health of Australians and the full effects of the measure will be seen over the long term.

Statistics on deaths caused by smoking and costs of smoking

- Each year, smoking kills around 15,000 Australians³ and costs society and the economy \$31.5 billion⁴.
- These data are the latest available statistics on deaths caused by smoking in Australia, and the social and economic costs of smoking in Australia.

National Monthly Tracking Survey

- The Department has provided funding to the Cancer Council Victoria, from 2011-12 to 2014-15, to conduct a national cross-sectional monthly tracking survey of smokers and recent quitters for the purpose of assessing the short to mid-term effects of tobacco plain packaging.
- The questionnaire encompasses smoking-related beliefs, attitudes and experiences, and uses questions drawn from and tested within previous surveys.
- The telephone interviews are a sample of not less than 400 smokers and recent quitters each month; a mix of population from urban, rural and remote locations from all states and territories.
- The follow up telephone interviews are conducted one month after the original survey.
- The baseline questionnaire (20 minutes in length) encompasses smoking-related beliefs, attitudes and experiences and uses questions drawn from and tested within previous surveys. There is also a one month follow-up questionnaire (5 minutes in length for all participants).
- The survey will also provide data pertaining to packaging, graphic health warnings, price, product and purchasing and media recall and appraisal.
- The Department is expecting to receive a report on the initial effects of tobacco plain packaging at the end of February 2014, and a report on the mid-term effects of tobacco plain packaging at the end of October 2014.

Background

- Effective 1 December 2012, all tobacco products sold in Australia have been required to be in plain packaging with larger, updated health warnings.
- The *Tobacco Plain Packaging Act 2011* prohibits tobacco industry logos, brand imagery, colours and promotional text other than brand and product names in a standard colour, position, font style and size appearing on retail packaging of tobacco products. Tobacco product retail packaging is required to appear in a drab dark brown colour in a matt finish.
- The objectives of the plain packaging legislation are to:
 - reduce the attractiveness and appeal of tobacco products to consumers, particularly young people;
 - increase the noticeability and effectiveness of mandated health warnings;
 - reduce the ability of the retail packaging of tobacco products to mislead consumers about the harms of smoking; and
 - through the achievement of these aims in the long term, as part of a comprehensive suite of tobacco control measures, contribute to efforts to reduce smoking rates.

³ Begg S, Vos T, Barker B, Stevenson C, Stanley L and Lopez A, The burden of disease and injury in Australia 2003. Section 4.3. PHE 82. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2007. <http://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=6442459747>

⁴ Collins D and Lapsley H. *The costs of tobacco, alcohol and illicit drug abuse to Australian society in 2004/05*. Executive Summary xi. P3 2625. Canberra: Department of Health and Ageing, 2008. [http://www.health.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/publishing.nsf/Content/34F55AF632F67B70CA2573F60005D42B/\\$File/mono64.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/publishing.nsf/Content/34F55AF632F67B70CA2573F60005D42B/$File/mono64.pdf)

Clearance

Clearance officer: Mr Nathan Smyth, First Assistant Secretary, Population Health Division Phone: (02) 6289 4522 Date: 05 February 2014	Contact officer: Reform Section Division and Branch: Tobacco Control Taskforce, Population Health Division Phone:
---	--

Attachments:
Nil.