



MEDIA RELEASE

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Wednesday 25 June 2014

Decline in funding for mass media campaigns undermines smokefree 2025 goal

A steady decline in funding for mass media campaigns to promote smoking reduction is undermining the Government's goal to achieve a smokefree New Zealand by 2025, warn ASPIRE 2025 researchers.

Analysis of campaigns by the main organisations implementing national tobacco control mass media campaigns published today in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* show a 43.8% reduction in expenditure between 2008/9 and 2012/13.

ASPIRE 2025 Co-Director Professor Richard Edwards says New Zealand is failing to deliver recommended levels of exposure to smokefree messages, and this failure may be hampering efforts to reduce smoking prevalence rapidly.

Professor Edwards argues that substantial and sustained increases in overall funding for media campaigns to support the Smokefree 2025 goal are needed.

“The Health Promotion Agency and Quitline have been working with limited resources to produce mass media campaigns that support the Smokefree 2025 goal. Increased funding will allow them to implement sustained, well resourced campaigns using best practice methods of delivery and messages that have been shown to work.”

The researchers also state that, with some exceptions, recent tobacco control campaigns have rarely included approaches shown to have the greatest impact on promoting quit attempts and reducing smoking initiation. These approaches include hard-hitting health messages and ‘denormalisation’ campaigns that highlight the hazardous and addictive nature of tobacco products, and expose tactics the tobacco industry uses to undermine tobacco control efforts.

Professor Edwards noted: “There needs to be a mix of campaign messages and approaches. We believe that mix should include more of the hard-hitting approaches that expose the reality of the suffering caused by tobacco smoking and expose the product and the industry for what they are – the direct causes of that suffering.”

However, Professor Edwards also highlights some promising developments. This includes reports that mass media funding for tobacco control through the Health Promotion Agency (HPA) will increase in 2014, and the recent launch of the HPA's

‘Stop before you start’ campaign, which highlights the negative health and social impacts of smoking and aims to increase young adults’ resistance to tobacco. New Zealand ASH has also been funded through the innovations fund to develop a new campaign.

Professor Edwards welcomes these new developments: “I hope ‘Stop before you start’ represents a sustained new focus that reveals the deadly nature of tobacco products, and exposes the tobacco industry, which continues to do everything it can to resist effective actions that would reduce smoking and the misery it causes.”

However, Professor Edwards also emphasises that the 2025 goal will not be achieved by intensifying tobacco control mass media efforts alone.

“The Government needs to take a lead by developing a strategy to achieve the Smokefree 2025 goal. As well as much greater resources for mass media campaigns, we call on the government to commit to continuing increases in tobacco taxation beyond 2016, introducing standardised (plain) packaging without delay, and providing high quality targeted support to help smokers from disadvantaged communities quit.”

Professor Edwards also points to the need for new measures: “There is ample evidence to show the public support reducing the availability of tobacco products. We should also modify tobacco products by removing the additives and flavours that make them palatable to new users, and consider removing the nicotine that makes them so addictive.”

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