



media release

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

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Standardised packaging a good step forward, but Otago researchers call for more in fight against tobacco

Today marks the introduction of standardised packaging for tobacco products sold in New Zealand.

Attractive brand imagery will be out, replaced by standardised brand names, and large pictorial warnings, set against a muddy-green background.

Co-Director of ASPIRE2025, Professor Janet Hoek, from the University of Otago, says the plain packaging policy represents a major step forward in protecting young people from smoking initiation, but calls on the Government to ensure standardised packs maintain their impact on smokers.

“On-pack warnings are very important because they allow us to reach all smokers, but we must recognise that people who have smoked for 30 years differ from young people who are experimenting or who regard themselves as social smokers,” she says.

Concerned by evidence from their earlier work which revealed young people rationalise warnings about long-term harms caused by smoking, Professor Hoek and her team developed and tested a range of new warnings.

In two Health Research Council of New Zealand-funded studies, recently published in *Tobacco Control* and the *Journal of Health Communication*, the researchers examined how young adults responded to different warning themes.

“We found that warnings illustrating the social risks of smoking and the harm smoking inflicts on innocent third parties, such as children and animals, as well as exposing the tobacco industry’s practices, elicited strong negative emotions and were significantly less likely to be selected in choice tasks,” Emeritus Professor Phil Gendall, lead author of both studies, says.

Professors Hoek and Gendall argue it is time to apply basic communications principles to on-pack warnings.

“No marketing manager would consider using a single communications theme for more than a decade, yet this has been the approach taken to date in New Zealand where the pictorial warnings introduced in 2008 have been used for ten years,” says Professor Hoek

The researchers call on the Government to undertake an on-going programme of warning development and implementation.

On-pack warnings need to resonate with diverse groups of smokers, and be refreshed regularly so smokers are exposed to multiple reasons for quitting.

The Government also needs to run an “intensive, complementary, mass media campaign” to channel dissonance caused by the new packs into quit attempts, as well as develop a thoughtful evaluation plan of the impact of plain packaging.

“We are only seven years from the Smokefree 2025 goal so we need to make sure that the policies introduced achieve maximum impact over a sustained period,” Professor Hoek says.

Research papers cited:

<http://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/early/2017/08/19/tobaccocontrol-2017-053719?paperoc=>

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