

SMOKEFREE 2025: TEN YEARS AND COUNTING. REPORT FROM THE PUBLIC HEALTH SUMMER SCHOOL, 2015

INTRODUCTION

This report briefly summarises discussions at a Public Health Summer School held at the University of Otago, Wellington on February 9, 2015. The 26 participants comprised a wide cross-section of the tobacco control community at national and local levels, and included researchers, advocates, public health practitioners and others. Slides from presentations given by participants will be made available on the ASPIRE 2025 website (www.aspire2025.org.nz).

The day was organised around the following themes:

- A review of the current status of Smokefree 2025 including trends and projections for smoking prevalence, current tobacco control activities and strategies; levels of public support and understanding; and Māori and Pacific perspectives.
- A review of current developments and possible future directions of existing approaches to achieve Smokefree 2025 including: packs and health warnings; mass media; smoking cessation; smokefree policies; and tobacco taxation.
- A review of the place of new and more radical approaches to achieve Smokefree 2025 including: retailer and supply focused interventions; product modification; and alternative nicotine delivery devices (e.g. e-cigs).
- Information on cutting-edge locally-based Smokefree 2025 interventions and strategies from Northland and Mid-Central.
- A discussion of priorities for next steps that would revitalise progress towards the Smokefree 2025 goal.

Note that this report records the views of participants as at Feb 9 about the status of Smokefree 2025 at the time, and future priorities to ensure it is achieved. There have been developments in the few weeks since then, for example the Ministry of Health's announcement about the realignment and re-tendering of Ministry-funded tobacco control and cessation services. At the time of writing, the implications of this realignment are unclear. Another new development is the launch of the National Smokefree Working Group's *Action Plan 2015-2018*.¹

CURRENT STATUS OF SMOKEFREE 2025

Since the recommendation of the Smokefree 2025 goal by the Māori Affairs Select Committee in 2010² and its adoption by the Government in 2011, some very positive developments have occurred that directly support the Smokefree 2025 goal. These include:

- implementation of the point of sale display ban
- smokefree prisons
- adoption of clear mid-term (2018) targets
- annual above-inflation tobacco taxation increases
- marked reductions in duty free allowances
- increased penalties for sales to minors

- novel mass media campaigns such as ‘Stop before You Start’.
- cutting-edge local initiatives (e.g. in Northland, Hawkes Bay, Auckland, Mid-Central, Canterbury)

These developments have been supported by a fully engaged tobacco control sector (including advocates, practitioners, clinicians, academics, NGO and community leaders and others), with clear Māori leadership provided through Te Ara Hā Ora and Pacific leadership through Tala Pasifika. This collaborative approach has led to a national *Next Steps* action plan led by the National Smokefree Working Group outlining clear priorities agreed by the tobacco control sector.³

However, despite these positive developments, participants expressed concern that we are in danger of losing momentum towards Smokefree 2025, and called for urgent corrective action. The latest smoking prevalence data and future projections^{4,5} show that New Zealand is not on track to achieve the Smokefree 2025 goal. For Māori and Pacific populations especially, smoking prevalence reductions are far too slow, gross disparities in smoking prevalence persist, and the goal of reaching a prevalence of 5% or less by 2025 will be missed by a substantial margin.

Particular concern was expressed by participants about:

- the low political priority given to the Smokefree 2025 goal
- loss of Māori political leadership at the national level
- poor public understanding of the Smokefree goal
- the lack of any coherent government plan to achieve the Smokefree 2025 goal
- lack of leadership from the Ministry of Health overall, and in relation to the emerging issue of e-cigarettes
- lack of any major new tobacco control policy interventions in the pipeline
- lack of progress on many of the National Smokefree Working Group’s Next Steps priorities such as smokefree cars, mandatory retailer registration, full disclosure of ingredients, and full FCTC implementation
- lack of progress in implementing many Maori Affairs Select Committee recommendations that the government has committed to considering, e.g:
 - measures to reduce supply and availability of tobacco products, including annual quota reductions (recc 5 and 6)
 - giving local councils options to control the number and location of retail outlets (recc 16)
 - compulsory reporting of additives by brand and regulation of nicotine content and additives (recc 8 and 9)
 - smokefree mass media campaigns aimed at Māori and pregnant women (recc 21)
 - legislation or other measures to reduce smoking in vehicles and specific public places, particularly where children at risk of negative role-modelling (recc 24)
 - decreasing allowances for home-grown tobacco (recc 41)

In addition to the points above, the low priority being given to Smokefree2025 is evidenced by:

- lack of government promotion of the goal e.g. no mass media promotion, little mention in political speeches⁷
- recent reductions in funding for mass media campaigns⁸
- failure to adopt Smokefree 2025 as a Better Public Services target (in contrast, for example, with reducing crime and boosting immunisation).

The Government has adopted health targets for increasing identification of smokers and providing quit advice and support in health care settings, but this is only one facet of the comprehensive programme that will be needed to achieve the Smokefree 2025 goal.

In summary, there was a sense of frustration that the Smokefree 2025 goal – that participants agreed was ground-breaking and achievable - may fail because of inadequate political commitment and leadership from central government. Such a failure will leave Māori and Pacific communities in particular to suffer an ongoing and wholly preventable burden of death and disease due to tobacco well into the future.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

There was broad agreement amongst summer school participants about what is needed to get Smokefree 2025 on track.

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Perhaps most importantly is the need for strong political leadership from the Government, and proactive and energetic allocation of resources and prioritisation of action to achieve the Smokefree 2025 goal by the Ministry of Health. We need a clear and decisive plan, with timelines and accountabilities, that builds on achievements to date and unites and coordinates efforts nationwide.

QUICK WINS

The first step is to get some quick wins to regenerate momentum, and engage the public, public health practitioners, and the political sector. The group identified a range of straightforward measures that could be implemented by central government quickly, with modest resources, and which would attract high levels of public support (making them highly feasible, politically). These included:

- Introduction of enhanced pack warnings with larger, better designs and new themes.
- An amendment to the Smokefree Environment Act to mandate that all children's playgrounds must be smokefree.
- Amendment of the Act and its regulations to mandate further disclosure of additives and constituents that are not at present disclosed, so consumers and the Ministry of Health know exactly what substances, and in what proportions, cigarettes and loose tobacco contain.
- Increased funding for mass media campaigns through the Health Promotion Agency and Quit Group.
- Targeted mass media campaigns and initiatives to promote and support smoking cessation in high risk groups (Māori, Pacific and pregnant women).
- Innovative workplace-based initiatives targeted particularly at workplaces with a high proportion of Māori, Pacific or young adult employees, or occupational groups that influence others (e.g. teachers).⁹

PLAIN PACKS, TAX, AND RETAIL AVAILABILITY

As well as these immediate measures, participants agreed there needs to be rapid progress on three key tobacco control priorities namely, plain packaging, an ongoing tobacco taxation plan, and action on the retail availability of tobacco.

There have been numerous government statements that plain packaging is 'inevitable'. However, although the Smoke-free Environments (Tobacco Plain Packaging) Amendment Bill, which passed its first reading on 11 February 2014 (118 votes to 1), was returned from the Health Select Committee on 05 August 2014, it still has no second reading date. If progress is put on hold until

legal cases concerning Australian Plain Packaging laws are resolved, this could mean a prolonged delay of a key measure to achieve Smokefree 2025, and contrasts with the far more rapid and robust approach taken by Ireland, UK and others.

There have been regular tobacco tax increases of 10% above CPI since 2011, and these are scheduled to continue until 2016. The Government has not indicated whether tax increases will be continued after that. Participants felt that there should be a clear ongoing commitment to substantial tobacco tax increases, and a smarter implementation of these so that their public health impact is maximised. This could include: integration with targeted mass media campaigns and augmentation of quit support services; hypothecation of additional tax revenue raised (particularly focused at promoting and supporting quitting among low-income smokers most affected by tax increases); and use of minimum pricing to prevent the industry minimising impact by restricting price increases for budget brands.

Finally, action to restrict the retail supply of tobacco was recommended in the Māori Affairs Select Committee report, and the Government committed to considering this. There are many possible interventions and the best approach is unclear. However, establishing a register and a revokable licensing system for retailers selling tobacco was agreed as an essential first step. Other possible measures that should be investigated as a priority include:

- measures to ban tobacco sales in close proximity to schools
- use of local by-laws (learning from the experience with alcohol retailer licensing)
- decoupling alcohol and tobacco usage by banning sales where alcohol is sold.

We agreed that we need to actively seek partnerships with retailers at local and national level, and should not assume that retailers are opponents of tobacco control. Many are strongly supportive and potential allies in the achievement of Smokefree 2025.

LONG TERM STRATEGY AND INNOVATION

We also need to be thinking beyond these immediate measures and encourage the Government to develop a credible and comprehensive longer term strategy to achieve Smokefree 2025. This should include consideration of more radical options like product modification (e.g. de-nicotinisation of cigarettes and removal of additives).

TOBACCO CONTROL SECTOR PRIORITIES

Although discussion was largely focused on the need for action by central government, participants also acknowledged that we need strong leadership within the tobacco control sector and must look to each other to facilitate progress. Participants agreed we need to identify opportunities to:

- promote the Smokefree 2025 goal and the actions needed to achieve it;
- generate political will;
- generate and demonstrate public support; and
- facilitate the emergence of potential champions, particularly in the political arena.

RAISE THE PROFILE OF SMOKEFREE 2025

While we must reinvigorate those in the tobacco control and health sectors, and increase political commitment, we must also elicit support for the goal more widely. Although surveys show strong public support for Smokefree 2025 and actions to achieve it¹⁰⁻¹⁵, there is little evidence of active community engagement on the issue. Participants agreed we need to:

- engage more with the public and communities, particularly among Māori and Pacific communities;
- frame Smokefree 2025 positively and effectively e.g. emphasising unifying themes like the protection of children and being smokefree as tikanga;
- identify 'pathway' policies and interventions that promote community participation and engagement with Smokefree 2025;
- engage with non-health focused policy-makers and leaders e.g. through the Iwi Leaders Forum and Local Government Conference;
- make better use of the excellent research evidence we have e.g. through media releases.

A national campaign to raise the profile of Smokefree 2025 was seen as a priority, and we discussed how this could be framed around today's children to ensure that future generations are truly smokefree.

A review of progress against the Māori Affairs Select Committee report recommendations was suggested as a possible measure to draw attention to the goal and increase its political priority. November 2015 will mark the fifth anniversary of the publication of this report; this seems an apt time for either the Select Committee itself or the sector to undertake such a review.

SCALE UP SUCCESSFUL LOCAL INITIATIVES

Participants applauded the energy, commitment and innovation displayed at the local level in many regions, for example:

- Northland Inter-sectoral Forum - a model of multi-agency collaborative action which could be reproduced in other regions (and in central government). See: <http://www.northlandinc.co.nz/regional-partnerships/northland-intersectoral-forum-nif>
- The *Tobacco-free Retailers Toolkit* – developed in Northland and now being taken up nationally and internationally (<http://www.smokefreeshops.co.nz/tobacco-free-retailers-toolkit/>).
- Palmerston North City Council is one of several local Councils leading the way on smokefree outdoor policies.

A strong theme that emerged was the need to support and learn from local initiatives, and implement successful approaches nationally.

CONCLUSIONS

The Summer School day was sobering but also energising and optimistic. Despite the current difficulties, we left with renewed belief that Smokefree 2025 will be achieved and, when it is, it will be a landmark achievement for the peoples of New Zealand and an example for others to follow around the world.

ABOUT THE REPORT

This report was written by Richard Edwards, Janet Hoek and Jude Ball (University of Otago) with input from the presenters and attendees of the Smokefree 2025 Summer School, who commented on earlier drafts. The views presented in this report are based on broad agreement but do not necessarily reflect the views of individual participants or the organisations they represent.

April 24, 2015

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