

Cigarettes should be sold in plain packaging in New Zealand

YES

The introduction of plain packaging is all about the protection and preservation of human lives and is a crucial step along the pathway to a Smokefree Aotearoa 2025.

Tobacco companies have been investing millions of dollars over the decades in aggressive marketing campaigns that link their products to common values and lifestyles, to persuade people that smoking is glamorous and sophisticated. As a grandmother of over 50 mokopuna [grandchildren] I am very aware of the effect of branding on a young person's psyche. Labels are all associated with being 'cool', sophisticated, 'hip' or linked to a champion sports team, movie or pop star. It is a status symbol to own and wear labels and they often define a young person's image. Research reveals that consumers buy branded products as much for their symbolic value as for their usefulness. The tobacco companies have effectively utilised marketing and branding to sell their products, to the detriment of our health and wellbeing. Once users try the product, they soon become addicted to the nicotine and then find

it very difficult to quit. That is why it has been necessary for the Government to introduce the Smoke-free Environments (Tobacco Plain Packaging) Amendment Bill. The Bill will remove the last avenue of marketing for manufacturers, by requiring all tobacco to be sold in bland, plain packets, with standardised fonts and colour, and covered by larger health warnings.

Ministry of Health monitoring of tobacco use shows we lose 4500–5000 New Zealanders prematurely every year to smoking-related diseases, such as cancer, heart disease, stroke and respiratory illnesses. That's 13 people a day. Smoking is also the leading cause of preventable death amongst Maori, and also harms non-smokers through exposure to second-hand smoke. Smoking rates for both Maori adults and Maori youth are about double the non-Maori New Zealanders' rate. The Bill, if passed, will become a part of a package of existing legislation, including annual increases in excise tax on tobacco and a ban on displaying tobacco products at shop counters. The Bill will also make it an offence to make or sell tobacco in non-standardised packets, with a maximum fine of \$600,000 for a company for breaching the rules. This will serve as a huge deterrent to manufacturers. All these measures together will enable our country to reach our goal of becoming Smokefree by 2025.

Hon. Tariana Turia

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Turia T. Cigarettes should be sold in plain packaging in New Zealand—the 'yes' case. *J Prim Health Care.* 2014;6(2):157–158.

While evidence can help inform best practice, it needs to be placed in context. There may be no evidence available or applicable for a specific patient with his or her own set of conditions, capabilities, beliefs, expectations and social circumstances. There are areas of uncertainty, ethics and aspects of care for which there is no one right answer. General practice is an art as well as a science. Quality of care also lies with the nature of the clinical relationship, with communication and with truly informed decision-making. The **BACK TO BACK** section stimulates debate, with two professionals presenting their opposing views regarding a clinical, ethical or political issue.



Hon. Tariana Turia



Jeff Rogut

BACK TO BACK this issue:

Despite the tobacco industry threats to take our Government to court if this legislation is passed, I am confident that the Bill is consistent with New Zealand's international trade obligations. New Zealand must retain its sovereignty and regulate in the best interests of its citizens. We must not 'cave in' to the bully tactics of the tobacco giants when their sole focus is on making huge profits, at the expense of human lives.

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The Maori Affairs Select Committee (MASC) led an *Inquiry into the tobacco industry in Aotearoa and the consequences of tobacco use for Maori* and released their report in 2010. Part of the inquiry was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the actions of the tobacco industry in promoting tobacco use amongst Maori. The MASC reported that exposure to tobacco through point-of-sale displays, packaging, covert marketing and whanau [family] who smoke, all induce children to try tobacco, and thus set them on the path to addiction.

The MASC recommended that: the Government consider initiating a counter-marketing campaign to de-normalise the tobacco industry and tobacco products and to better inform all New Zealanders of past and ongoing industry practices and strategies; the success of Smokefree campaigns be recognised; the Government continue to market to groups with high smoking rates, particularly Maori and pregnant women; and that the tobacco industry be required to provide tobacco products exclusively in plain packaging.

We know that tobacco companies are paying for their own research to try and prove that plain

packaging does not increase the sale of tobacco, or makes no difference. We should not rely on tobacco company statements based on non-peer reviewed studies and surveys they often commission for themselves, and then promote for their own purposes. Tobacco industry-commissioned surveys of smoking rates are unreliable as they are not done to the same high standard as, for example, the New Zealand Ministry of Health surveys which have much larger samples and more statistical rigour.

Philip Morris International Inc. circulated data from at least two surveys of smoking prevalence funded by tobacco companies. One project at Zurich University was entitled: *The (possible) effect of plain packaging on the smoking prevalence of minors in Australia: a trend analysis*. The Cancer Council Victoria in Australia says that the data are seriously flawed and that the report was produced on the assumption that plain packaging could be expected to immediately lead to a detectable reduction in adolescent smoking prevalence. The Council says no other tobacco control intervention has achieved that, and neither is this the expectation of governments or credible researchers. The process of smoking uptake in adolescence is gradual, beginning with the first puff of a cigarette, and then a period of experimentation of sharing puffs and cigarettes that can last some years. In Australia, the first official survey results that take in the advent of plain packaging will not be available before the end of 2014 at the earliest—because these are being done to appropriate standards for post-implementation review.

Plain packaging works on consumer and societal perceptions, which build up slowly over time. It will take some time before plain packs and the graphic images of the bigger and stronger health warnings stop enough people from experimenting with smoking, or prompt enough people to quit, to have a marked effect on smoking rates. All the evidence suggests that it will definitely help this happen over time because it is effectively the antidote to all the tobacco company marketing ploys, designed to increase their sales. If plain packaging does not work, why then do tobacco companies so desperately want to retain their branding?