mpower

W Warn about the dangers of tobacco

Commitments of Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC)[1]

- Ensure that tobacco product packaging and labelling do not promote a tobacco product by any means that are false, misleading [or] deceptive.

- Ensure that tobacco products carry rotating, large, clear, visible and legible health warnings describing the harmful effects of tobacco use, covering no less than 30% of the principal display areas but preferably 50% or more. The health warnings may include pictures or be in the form of pictograms.

- Adopt and implement effective legislative, executive, administrative or other measures to promote broad access to effective and comprehensive educational and public awareness programmes on the health risks, including the addictive characteristics of tobacco consumption and exposure to tobacco smoke.

Global evidence

Large, highly visible, pictorial warnings are:

- more likely to be noticed by smokers;[2]

- more effective in increasing smokers' awareness of tobacco's true risks,[3] especially for low-literacy audiences;[4]

- more likely to drive smokers to quit tobacco use;[5]

- likely to prevent non-smokers from taking up smoking.[6]

Hard-hitting mass media campaigns:

- increase uptake of cessation services;[7]

- convince tobacco users to quit.[8]

Global best practice

Graphic warning labels on tobacco packaging and hard-hitting mass media campaigns reduce tobacco use.

Effective warning labels should:[9]

- describe the harmful effect of tobacco use;

- be large, clear, visible, and legible, covering 50% or more of principal pack display areas (both front and back);

- rotate periodically so that they continue to attract the attention of the public;

- appear in the country's principal language(s);

- appear on individual packages, as well as on any outside packaging and labelling used in retail sales;

- include graphic full colour pictures;

- provide advice about cessation.

Best practice mass media campaigns are national campaigns conducted with at least seven of the following characteristics, including airing on television and/or radio, which signify the use of a comprehensive communication approach.

- The campaign is part of a comprehensive tobacco control programme.

- Before the campaign, research is undertaken or reviewed to gain a thorough understanding of the target audience.

- Campaign communications materials are pretested with the target audience and refined in line with campaign objectives.

- Air time (radio, television) and/or placement (billboards, print advertising, etc.) is obtained by purchasing or securing it using either the organization's own internal resources or an external media planner or agency.

- The implementing agency works with journalists to gain publicity or news coverage for the campaign.

World Health Organization

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- Process evaluation is undertaken to assess how effectively the campaign had been implemented.
- An outcome evaluation is implemented to assess campaign impact.
- The campaign is aired on television and/or radio.

Global impact

- More than 1.3 million fewer smokers and 689 790 deaths averted by implementation of "best practice" warning labels in seven countries across the world, including Djibouti, Egypt and the Islamic Republic of Iran.[10]

Regional status and data

Graphic health warnings are effective in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

- In Egypt, the first country in the Region to mandate pictorial health warnings, nearly all smokers have noticed the health warnings and almost 45% have thought about quitting.[11]

In the Region, pictorial health warnings are found in many countries[12] and occupy different percentages on cigarette packets.

- In Pakistan, pictorial health warnings occupy 85% of cigarette packets.
- In Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen, pictorial health warnings occupy 50% of cigarette packets.
- In Jordan, pictorial health warnings occupy 45% of cigarette packets.

Actions needed

- Follow the guidelines for implementation of Article 11 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, on packaging and labelling of tobacco products.
- Maximize the impact of warning labels and mass media campaigns – use graphic images that depict the true consequences of tobacco use.
- Mandate large, clear, rotating pictorial health warnings on all tobacco packaging sold in retail.
- Expand and sustain pro-active anti-tobacco mass media campaigns.

A picture is worth more than a thousand words – pictorial health warnings save lives.

Facts and fallacies: the truth about health warning labels and media campaigns

Fallacy: Tobacco users already know the risks of tobacco use.

Fact: Smokers and non-smokers alike tend to underestimate the true risks of tobacco use.[3] Many smokers believe their risk from smoking is lower than other smokers,[4] and are even less aware of the risks of secondhand smoke to others.[5] Moreover, people tend to underestimate the risks of smokeless tobacco compared to cigarettes; for instance, 96% of Qatar adults believe smoking causes serious illness compared to only 80% who think smokeless tobacco causes disease.[13] Smokers report that they receive more information about the risks of smoking from the tobacco product package than from any other source except television.[4] Therefore, having health warnings as a prominent component of tobacco packaging and hard-hitting media campaigns are critical in increasing tobacco users' knowledge of the real risks of tobacco use.

Fallacy: There is no proof that pictorial warnings work.

Fact: The growing body of research evidence clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of pictorial warnings over text-only warnings.[4, 14–17] Altogether, the research on pictorial warnings show that they are: (1) more likely to be noticed than text-only warning[4] labels; (2) more effective for educating smokers about the health risks of smoking and for increasing smokers' thoughts about the health risks;[17] and (3) associated with increased motivation to quit smoking.[6]

Fallacy: Mandating graphic health warnings violates tobacco manufacturers' property rights and trademark protections.

Fact: Tobacco companies have argued that pictorial warnings are a violation of intellectual property rights. The tobacco industry has challenged governments' rights to impose pictorial warnings in Canada, the European Union, Brazil, and India, among others.[18] In the European Union, tobacco manufacturers argued that the labelling directive infringed on Article 20 of the Agreement on the Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights ('the TRIPs Agreement') as set out in the World Trade Organization Agreement.[19] In all of these cases, the courts have upheld the government's right to impose pictorial warnings as a public health protection measure, given the significant health and economic impact of tobacco use. The truth is, in all

legal systems, the government's duty to protect public health takes precedence over trade considerations, and mandating pictorial health warnings is an effective means of protecting the public from the adverse health impacts of tobacco use. Not surprisingly, to date, the tobacco industry has never mounted a successful legal challenge to prevent the use of pictorial health warnings.

Fallacy: Mandatory rotating pictorial health warnings impose undue hardship for governments.

Fact: Mandatory pictorial health warnings do not impose any hardship on governments, because the tobacco manufacturers are responsible for the actual printing.[1]

Fallacy: Mandatory rotating pictorial warnings are too expensive and technologically prohibitive for tobacco manufacturers.

Fact: Most tobacco manufacturers already have the technological capacity to create new designs in packaging[20] and the technology required to print pictorial warnings is widespread. Thus, the cost and technology required to implement pictorial warning labels is minimal.

Fallacy: Pictorial health warnings are not feasible in developing countries.

Fact: Of the countries in the world that mandate pictorial health warnings, about half are low- and middle-income countries. In fact, low- and middle-income countries were among the first to implement pictorial warnings.[16] Moreover, the majority of tobacco brands sold in low- and middle-income countries are owned by large multinational tobacco companies, who already manufacture packages with pictorial warnings in dozens of jurisdictions throughout the world.[19]

Fallacy: Pictorial health warnings and hard-hitting mass media campaigns are socially unacceptable.

Fact: The photos that are used in graphic health warnings and hard-hitting media campaigns depict the true health consequences of tobacco use. Public support for pictorial health warnings is strong, among both users and non-users of tobacco products, and increases over time.[20] In countries that already have large picture warnings, such as Canada, smokers report wanting to see more health information on their packages.[21] Media campaigns using graphic images of illness and showing people suffering or dying demonstrate the harm caused by tobacco use, and are especially effective in convincing tobacco users to quit.[9,22–23] Clearly, pictorial warning labels and

hard-hitting campaigns are accepted by the general public as an effective means of communicating the real health risks of tobacco use.

Reveal the truth through graphic health warnings and hard-hitting mass media campaigns.

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