



## Frequently asked questions

### Warn people of the hazards of tobacco use through displaying large clear graphic health warnings

#### Q: Do tobacco users know the risks of tobacco use?

**Tobacco users do not already know the risks of tobacco use.** Smokers and non-smokers alike tend to underestimate the true risks of tobacco use. Many smokers believe their risk from smoking is lower than other smokers, and are even less aware of the risks of second-hand smoke to others. 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.

Smokers report that they receive more information about the risks of smoking from the tobacco product package than from any other source, except television. Therefore, having health warnings as a prominent component of tobacco packaging and running hard-hitting media campaigns are critical in increasing tobacco users' knowledge of the real risks of tobacco use. Where it is feasible, warnings should carry quitline phone numbers.

#### Q: Are graphic health warnings effective?

**Graphic warnings work.** The growing body of research evidence clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of graphic warnings over text-only warnings. Altogether, the research on graphic warnings show that they are: 1) more likely to be noticed than text-only warning labels; 2) more effective for educating smokers about the health risks of smoking and for increasing smokers' thoughts about the health risks; and 3) associated with increased motivation to quit smoking.

#### Q: Does mandating graphic health warnings violate tobacco manufacturers' property rights and trademark protections?

**Mandating graphic health warnings does not violate tobacco manufacturers' property rights and trademark protections.** Tobacco companies have argued that graphic warnings are a violation of intellectual property rights. The tobacco industry has challenged governments' rights to impose graphic warnings in Brazil, Canada, the European Union and India, among others. 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. In all of these cases, the courts have upheld the government's right to impose graphic 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 graphic 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 graphic health warnings. Furthermore, there is no evidence that plain packaging leads to any difficulty for retailers or smokers to identify brands.



**Q: Do mandatory rotating graphic health warnings impose undue hardship for governments?**

**Mandatory rotating graphic health warnings do not impose undue hardship for governments.** Mandatory graphic health warnings do not impose any hardship on governments because the tobacco manufacturers are responsible for the actual printing and they take up the related cost. So while governments decide which warnings will be used, the tobacco industry pay for it.

**Q: Are mandatory rotating graphic warnings too expensive or technologically prohibitive for tobacco manufacturers?**

**Mandatory rotating graphic warnings are not too expensive nor technologically prohibitive for tobacco manufacturers.** Most tobacco manufacturers already have the technological capacity to create new designs in packaging and the technology required to print graphic warnings is widespread. Thus, the cost and technology required to implement graphic warning labels is minimal.

**Q: Are graphic health warnings feasible in low-income countries?**

**Graphic health warnings are feasible in low-income countries.** Of the countries in the world that mandate graphic health warnings, about half are low- and middle-income countries. In fact, low- and middle-income countries were among the first to implement graphic warnings. 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 graphic warnings in dozens of jurisdictions throughout the world.

**Q: Are graphic health warnings and hard-hitting mass media campaigns socially acceptable?**

**Graphic health warnings and hard-hitting mass media campaigns are socially acceptable.** 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 graphic health warnings is strong, among both users and non-users of tobacco products, and increases over time. In countries that already have large picture warnings, such as Canada, smokers report wanting to see more health information on their packages. 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. Clearly, graphic 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.