

## Plain packaging saves lives

***Member States should step up their efforts to reduce tobacco use to prevent smoking-related chronic diseases***

31 MAY 2016, BRUSSELS: On World No Tobacco Day 2016, the European Chronic Disease Alliance (ECDA) calls on EU Member States to introduce plain packaging following the bold examples of the UK, France and Ireland. Plain packaging has proven effective both to help tobacco users quit and to dissuade others - particularly youth - from trying these highly addictive, deadly products.<sup>1</sup>

Young people who do not start smoking before the age of 20 will usually never smoke at all, which increases the urgency of introducing measures to protect our youth from starting in the first place.<sup>2</sup>

Every year, on 31 May, WHO marks World No Tobacco Day (WNTD), highlighting the severe health consequences of tobacco use and advocating for effective policies to snuff out tobacco consumption. This year the WHO and the Secretariat of the [WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control](#) are calling on countries to implement plain packaging.

Plain packaging -- packs without branding, a standardised unappealing colour, and large warnings with both grim images of the health consequences and text -- have been proven to work. Two years after Australia's 2012 introduction of plain packs, cigarette consumption dropped by 11 percent.<sup>3,4</sup>

Tobacco packaging is key to the regulation of marketing and advertising as the pack represents the last place where tobacco companies can indeed display their claims and influence consumers' decisions to buy – or not buy these products.

The 2014 EU Tobacco Products Directive (TPD), which amongst others mandates health warnings covering 65% of the front and back of packages, has set the wheels in motion and ensures that national governments have the mandate they need to introduce plain packaging.

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<sup>1</sup> Hammond D., Arnott D., Dockrell M., Lee A., McNeill A. (2009). Cigarette pack design and perceptions of risk among UK adults and youth: Evidence in support of plain packaging. *European Journal of Public Health*, 19, 631–637 [PubMed]

<sup>2</sup> White V., Webster B., Wakefield M. (2008). Do graphic health warning labels have an impact on adolescents' smoking-related beliefs and behaviours? *Addiction*, 103, 1562–1571 doi:10.1111/j.1360-0443.2008.02294.x [PubMed]

<sup>3</sup> Australian Government Department of Health, Tobacco key facts and figures. <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/tobacco-kff>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.who.int/features/2013/australia\\_tobacco\\_packaging/en/](http://www.who.int/features/2013/australia_tobacco_packaging/en/)

The UK, France and Ireland have forged the path for the first national plain-packaging laws in the EU, and predictably, the multibillion euro tobacco industry responded with legal action on the grounds of violation of intellectual property rights. However, the recent landmark judgement by the UK High Court on 20 May dismissing industry's claims, may help the other European countries<sup>5</sup> looking to introduce the policy.

Following the WHO's example of backing countries being threatened with legal action, the ECDA calls on the EU to coordinate efforts to swiftly end the tobacco industry's tactics to delay this vital work. It is clear that implementing the TPD and other tobacco control measures will require greater levels of investment across the EU, but overwhelming health-economic evidence shows that this is the second most cost-effective use of health funds after childhood immunisation<sup>6</sup>.

### **A deadly truth**

The scientific evidence for the adverse health effects of smoking is profoundly overwhelming. There is a direct relationship between the number of cigarettes smoked and the risk of cancer, cardiovascular and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases (COPD) and smoking is also proven to be an independent risk factor for diabetes, hypertension, heart failure, kidney disease and asthma.<sup>7</sup>

The ugly reality is, over half of all smokers will be killed by their smoking.

According to the WHO, however, smokers who give up their habit by the age of 40 gain back nearly all of the 10 years of life expectancy that smoking costs them. A Danish study found that the lifetime economic gains from quitting at age 35 were more than €25,000 for men and €34,000 for women, of which about two-thirds was from increased productivity.<sup>8</sup>

The ECDA calls on EU Member States to introduce plain cigarette packaging to make swift strides in the reduction of tobacco use and improve the health of citizens across the EU region.

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### ***The European Chronic Diseases Alliance***

*The [European Chronic Disease Alliance \(ECDA\)](http://www.alliancechronicdiseases.org) is a coalition of 11 European health organisations sharing the same interests in combating preventable chronic diseases through European policies that impact health. ECDA represents millions of chronic disease patients and over 200 000 health professionals. ECDA's mission is to reverse the alarming rise in chronic diseases by providing leadership and policy recommendations based on contemporary evidence.*

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<sup>5</sup> Countries in the advanced stages of considering adoption of plain packaging include Slovenia, Finland, Belgium, Hungary and Norway.

<sup>6</sup> Merkur S, Sassi F, McDaid D. Promoting health, preventing disease: is there an economic case? WHO Europe.2013. [http://www.euro.who.int/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/235966/e96956.pdf](http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/235966/e96956.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Bjartveit K, Tverdal A. Health consequences of smoking 1–4 cigarettes per day. *Tobacco Control*. 2005;14(5):315–20.

<sup>8</sup> Taylor, Donald H. et al. "Benefits of Smoking Cessation for Longevity." *American Journal of Public Health* 92.6 (2002): 990–996.