

Smokefree Coalition challenges New Zealand after 10 years of global tobacco control

Smokefree Coalition media release

Embargoed until 12am, 27 February 2015

The Smokefree Coalition wants New Zealanders everywhere to mark the tenth anniversary of an international tobacco control treaty by striking a blow against Big Tobacco.

Today is the 10 year anniversary of the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), the first global public health treaty. New Zealand was among the first nations to ratify the treaty, which today has 180 Parties.

"Targeting tobacco first was no accident. The world knew that, without collaborative worldwide action, it faced one billion deaths from tobacco consumption in the 21st century," says Smokefree Coalition Executive Director Dr Prudence Stone.

"If tobacco was introduced to the market today, it would swiftly be outlawed like many other psychoactive substances have been. But unfortunately, it was introduced long before its fatal effects were known. Now, despite a mountain of evidence condemning it as a killer, we are faced with an industry-promulgated health problem that caring governments everywhere must try to regulate and control."

The Smokefree Coalition calls on the New Zealand public to support the Government's commitment to make our country smokefree by 2025, by condemning the tobacco industry, particularly in the eyes of their children. It asks for adults who smoke to shield their children from exposure, and to encourage them to mistrust tobacco company messages and marketing, which are targeted toward their children starting smoking.

"Half of smokers' lives are cut short by smoking. The industry needs new customers if they are to stay in business. Children do what adults model, so we call on adults everywhere to model responsible and protective smokefree behaviour."

Dr Stone says New Zealand was once seen as the global leader in tobacco control when the FCTC was first ratified.

"Our Smoke-free Environments Amendment Act banned smoking in all workplaces and now requires graphic warning labels on tobacco packaging. Until 2016 tobacco excise tax will increase annually, forcing the tobacco industry to price its products beyond what youngsters can afford. Retailers must now hide tobacco products from display, and at New Zealand's border the duty-free allowance for tobacco has been drastically reduced."

But Dr Stone is concerned that New Zealand's lead is slipping. Australia legislated plain packaging of tobacco products in 2012. Ireland, England and even the Solomon Islands are following suit, while New Zealand is stalled in fear of Big Tobacco's threats of litigation.

Scotland, Wales and England have announced brave plans to ban smoking in cars carrying children, while our own Government seems content with health promotion appeals.

Above all, New Zealand remains without a solid Government strategy toward its Smokefree 2025 goal.

The Smokefree Coalition says 27 February is an ideal moment for New Zealanders to reflect and for the Government to pat itself on the back for some great achievements since ratifying the FCTC 10 short years ago. But it asks whether, in 10 more short years, we will have achieved our goal of being the first smokefree nation in the world.

“Without regaining our world leadership and finding the courage for needed legislation changes, New Zealand risks losing the endgame to Big Tobacco,” says Dr Stone.

“And the loss will be measured in real lives and quality of lives among our family members and friends.”