



MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 21 September 2011

Australia funds global efforts against tobacco death

Support for improved tax systems follows world-leading move on plain packs

International efforts to reduce the health harms of tobacco use will be boosted by a \$700,000 Australian Government grant announced today, according to Cancer Council Australia and the National Heart Foundation of Australia.

CEO of Cancer Council Australia, Professor Ian Olver, and his counterpart at the National Heart Foundation, Dr Lyn Roberts, commended the Government for the grant, announced today by Health Minister Nicola Roxon at a United Nations meeting on non-communicable diseases in New York.

Professor Olver and Dr Roberts said the funds would support the Framework Convention for Tobacco Control (FCTC), a WHO treaty aimed at reducing the impact of tobacco on health worldwide; \$400,000 would assist countries in preparing guidelines on the use of taxation to reduce smoking rates.

“Funding guidelines on tobacco tax has great potential to reduce the global tobacco toll, because increased price through taxation is one of the main reasons smoking rates are relatively low in countries like Australia,” said Professor Olver, who is also in New York to discuss global cancer issues.

“Many of the developing nations signed up to the FCTC collect comparatively low rates of tobacco tax, despite bearing a hugely disproportionate burden of tobacco-related deaths. Best practice guidelines will support improved taxation systems, discouraging tobacco use, increasing revenue to fund public health services and fostering a global approach to tobacco tax.

“The only winners from low tobacco tax are the big tobacco companies, who increasingly peddle tobacco addiction to lower income countries where tobacco taxes are lower and they can sell more product – and where more people are dying prematurely as a result.”

Dr Roberts said the funds were another example of Australia’s global leadership towards reducing the tobacco death toll, announced only weeks after the House of Representatives passed laws to mandate plain packaging of tobacco products sold in Australia.

“On current smoking trends, around half a billion people in the world today face a premature death from tobacco-related illnesses such as cardiovascular disease,” she said.

“Most of them are in developing countries, which are already disadvantaged. By taking the lead on innovative public health policy like plain packaging, and helping other countries to help themselves by developing guidelines on tobacco tax, Australia is showing great global leadership.

“Minister Roxon in particular should be commended for her extraordinary commitment to reducing the health harms of smoking, both in Australia and internationally.”

The funding is in addition to \$25 million over four years announced by the Australian Government earlier this month to support chronic disease prevention and treatment in the Pacific region.

Media contacts

Paul Grogan, Cancer Council 0409-456-727 paul.grogan@cancer.org.au

Kirsten Andrews, Heart Foundation 0413-777-404 Kirsten.Andrews@heartfoundation.org.au