



**Hong Kong Council on
Smoking and Health**



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To : Panel on Health Services, Legislative Council

Implementation of Multi-pronged Tobacco Control Policies

Tobacco kills. Of two smokers who continue to smoke, one will be killed by smoking. For those who started to smoke at young age, two out of three will be killed by smoking. Cigarette smoking is highly hazardous to health of smokers as well as non-smokers exposed to secondhand smoke (SHS) and thirdhand smoke, especially the effects on children's health. Many chronic and fatal diseases caused by smoking and SHS, such as cancers, cardiac vascular diseases, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lead to heavy burden on the medical and health system. Tobacco is responsible for 5,600 and 1,300 deaths caused by smoking and SHS respectively and community costs of more than HK\$5.3 billion (excluding the loss of lives) annually in Hong Kong, with an average of 20 deaths every day. The Hong Kong SAR Government should introduce effective and comprehensive tobacco control policies to protect the health of the public.

WHO has recommended six effective tobacco control policies and measures called MPOWER, comprising M – Monitor tobacco use; P – Protect people from tobacco smoke; O – Offer help to quit tobacco use; W – Warn about the dangers of tobacco; E – Enforce bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship and R – Raise taxes on tobacco. Hong Kong has introduced relevant policies for the first five measures but there are still rooms for improvement, such as expansion of no-smoking areas, allocations of more resources for smoking cessation services, smoke-free education and promotions, etc. However, the tax rate on tobacco has not reached the minimum standard of WHO.

Many studies have revealed that raise tobacco tax can encourage smoking cessation, prevent relapse of smoking and deter youth from smoking. The School of Public Health of The University of Hong Kong has conducted surveys to monitor the prevalence of youth smoking for years and found that the 50% increase in tobacco tax in 2009 had lowered the adolescent current smoking rate from 6.9% to 4.8% in early 2010 and 3.4% in late 2010, i.e. an overall 51% drop in adolescent smoking. These studies provide strong evidence that the increase in tobacco tax is effective in reducing smoking rate among adolescents. After the announcements of raising tobacco tax in 2009 and 2011, the number of calls to cessation hotline operated by Department of Health also surged drastically. These indicate that raise tobacco tax is effective in encouraging smoking cessation

Responding to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, many countries have set their ultimate targets in tobacco control. In 2009, the government of Finland was urged to undertake policies that make Finland smoke-free by 2040. This means that tobacco use is to be reduced by 10% annually to address their present prevalence of 20% of daily smoking adults. The government of New Zealand, where about 20% of adults are cigarette smokers, has made a commitment in 2010 to make the country smoke-free in 2025 by tightening smoke-free legislations and raising tobacco tax.

The smoking prevalence of Hong Kong (11.1%) is much lower than these 2 countries and the Government should set a long-term target on tobacco control. It is projected that the Hong Kong population will reach 8 million in 2030s. Even though our smoking prevalence could be kept at around 10% level, the number of smokers will not fall significantly. Through comprehensive and multi-pronged tobacco control measures, the Government should set an annual target for a continued decrease of smoking prevalence by 0.5 percentage point so that the smoking prevalence could be dropped to 5% or lower after 13 years, i.e. 2025.

Hong Kong Council on Smoking and Health, School of Public Health and School of Nursing of The University of Hong Kong urge the Honourable Legislative Councillors to expedite the Government to fully implement the comprehensive and multi-pronged tobacco control policies and measures for the health of the public. Therefore, people from all walks of life can alert the hazards of smoking and join hand in hand for a smoke-free Hong Kong.