

The Legislative Council of the HKSAR
Legislative Council Secretariat
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong

Dear Sir/Madam,

I would like to express my strong support for the Government's proposals to increase the size of pictorial warnings on cigarette packages to 85%. As a fourth-year medical student at the University of Hong Kong, I am alarmed at the indifference of many legislators to the dire public health consequences of smoking. Legislators who refuse to support stronger tobacco control will be complicit in countless needless deaths, as well as in the suffering of patients afflicted with chronic, debilitating diseases such as emphysema.

Hong Kong has not increased the size of pictorial warnings, which currently stands at 50% of cigarette packs, since 2007. In that time, many countries have moved ahead or have plans to do so, such as Nepal (to 90%), Vanuatu (90%), India (85%), Thailand (85%) and Uruguay (80%). Indeed, the Government's proposals to increase pictorial warnings to 85% are already weaker than the "plain packaging" requirements implemented in Australia in 2012 (100%). Available evidence shows that larger pictorial warnings are effective in deterring new smokers, particularly young people, and in increasing the desire of existing smokers to quit.

Perhaps the most damaging myth put forward by detractors of this proposal is that it will cause an increase in tobacco trafficking and a corresponding decrease in tax revenue. This claim is not supported by evidence from the United Kingdom, Australia, and Belgium. The tobacco industry has a documented history of making unsubstantiated claims, particularly regarding the health consequences of smoking. Industry representatives similarly claimed that increases in tobacco tax and mandating smoke-free restaurants would fuel illicit trade and hurt business--both of these claims have proven false. Even if this proposal were to somehow decrease tax revenue (which is unlikely, based on evidence from other countries), any decrease in tax revenue will be offset by savings in future healthcare expenditure. This proposal makes sense from both a public health and fiscal perspective.

I urge all legislators to act with integrity and to be worthy of the responsibility that the Hong Kong public has vested in them by voting for this proposal.

Mr. Hin Sing Leung
MBBS Student, The University of Hong Kong