



LI KA SHING FACULTY OF MEDICINE  
THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG  
香港大學李嘉誠醫學院

17 May 2017

Clerk to Subcommittee on Smoking (Public Health) (Notices) (Amendment) Order 2017  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
Legislative Council Complex  
1 Legislative Council Road, Central  
Hong Kong

Dear Sir/Madam

**Re: Smoking (Public Health) (Notices) (Amendment) Order 2017**

I write to strongly support the government's proposal on increasing the size of the pictorial warnings to 85%. I have submitted deputations earlier and would like to emphasize the urgency of the matter as the process has been delayed for about two years. I have talked to many people including staff and students of our School of Public Health, The University of Hong Kong and they all strongly support so. The opposition and delay tactics of the tobacco industry and related sectors should not be allowed to override public health measures which will prevent many tobacco induced diseases, disabilities and deaths and the related economic burden and human suffering. The very strong opposition means that the effects would be very strong on quitting and reducing consumption.

World Health Organization has clearly stated that of one out of two smokers will be killed and die prematurely from smoking. I strongly advocate that this absolute risk of 'one out of two killed by smoking' should be included as a warning statement which can be understood by everyone. We have research evidence to show that such warning can help smokers to quit smoking. New evidence has further shown that the risk could be up to two out of three, if smokers have started smoking at a young age and smoke heavily. Our numerous studies in Hong Kong and in the mainland, which have been published in international peer reviewed journals, have shown also very high risks of diseases and deaths due to smoking and secondhand smoking in children, young people, adult men and women including older people. Hong Kong has more than 600,000 smokers and about 300,000 will die from smoking. Any delay will mean more cancer, heart diseases, stroke, respiratory and many other diseases in smokers, and in nonsmokers who are affected by secondhand smoke.

Evidence from other countries and our studies in Hong Kong has shown that increasing the size of the health warnings is effective. Using the largest possible size for the health warnings is the most cost effective method for public health education on the harms of smoking and promoting smoking cessation. Conservatively, even if 1% of smokers quit after implementing the proposal, this would mean having at least 6000 new quitters, saving more than 3000 lives and reducing much social and economic costs. We certainly expect the figures and the health and economic benefits would be much greater. We have done many smoking cessation studies including clinical trials and have shown that quitting smoking have many health benefits. We have also found increasing tobacco tax can increase smokers' motivation to quit and seek help from smoking cessation services. We urge the LegCo to support a large increase in tobacco tax, as such, together with increasing the size of the health warnings would have strong synergistic effects on quitting and reducing tobacco consumption.



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In the Hong Kong Council on Smoking Health (COSH) tobacco control policy surveys, we have found that the existing health warnings have some effects in motivating smokers to quit or reduce smoking but the effects have been diminishing as the warnings have not been updated and expanded for about 10 years. We have also found very strong public support for the proposal on 85%.

Although most people know that smoking is harmful, the knowledge and awareness is low in many smokers and nonsmokers. The implementation of larger health warnings will certainly raise the awareness and increase the knowledge of most people, and would motivate many more nonsmokers to protect themselves from secondhand smoke and help their relatives or friends to stop smoking. While we have also found stronger public support on plain packaging and would advocate plain packaging for Hong Kong, the increase in the size of the warnings to 85% would still be a major step forward to effectively reduce the attractiveness of the cigarette packs. The tobacco industry has been using the loop hole in the existing laws which ban tobacco advertising to advertise their lethal products by large displays of cigarette packs at retailing outlets. The COSH policy survey has shown that such displays are perceived by many as tobacco advertising. The next step is to ban tobacco product display completely in Hong Kong.

We would like to emphasize the strong and positive effects of the 85% health warnings on preventing smoking in children and young people. The existing cigarette packs are still attractive to children and young people who are exposed to them frequently at home and on the streets. The large new warnings will increase their awareness and knowledge about the many harms of tobacco, and denormalize smoking in their peers and the community at large. The effects will be particularly strong in those with parents and others who smoke near them. We know many children do not like their parents smoke, and the new warnings would help them to help their parents quit smoking.

We understand the importance of monitoring and evaluating all tobacco control measures and have been doing so for a few decades. We are committed and are planning for a systematic and vigorous evaluation for this new regulation as well as other measures. We are also dedicated to help smokers to quit by providing evidence base smoking cessation services and develop and generate new evidence for innovative and more cost effective interventions. We also urge the government to provide more funding and other support to expand the smoking cessation campaigns, services and research.

Professor TH Lam  
Sir Robert Kotewall Professor in Public Health  
Chair Professor in Community Medicine