



January 9, 2017

The Legislative Council of the HKSAR
Panel on Health Services
Legislative Council Secretariat
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong

Dear Sir/Madam,

I have been authorised to respond on behalf of the Dean of Medicine and respectfully submit this letter on behalf of the Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine, The University of Hong Kong. The LKS Faculty of Medicine, the University of Hong Kong strongly supports the FHB's proposals on pictorial warnings, to increase the size to at least 85% of the package, to show more alarming and shocking pictures of the serious harms of smoking, including but not limited to the WHO warning that smoking kills one out of two smokers, and the Quitline number 1833183. We urge the FHB and LegCo to implement the new regulations as soon as possible, as any delay would mean more diseases and deaths in Hong Kong.

Our faculty especially those from the Schools of Public Health and Nursing, inter alia, have been conducting research showing the very serious harms of smoking in Hong Kong, and the strong support of the public for stronger tobacco control measures, as advocated by the World Health Organisation MPOWER strategies and the FHB. Hong Kong has about 600,000 smokers, and at least 300,000 or half of them will be killed by tobacco if they do not quit immediately. Their continuing smoking will lead to excessive disease, disability and economic burdens to themselves, their families and our community.

We do need urgent, strong and effective measures to save as many lives as quickly as possible and we must not allow such measures to be delayed by dubious

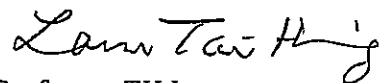
arguments and self interests of the tobacco and related industry and sectors. Increasing tobacco tax substantially is among the most effective measures to reduce consumption and smoking prevalence in the population, particularly in young people. We are very disappointed that the government has failed to do so in the past few years, and the trend of smoking prevalence has expectedly shown only small decreases in recent Thematic Household Surveys.

The general public in Hong Kong, including smokers and nonsmokers, and particularly young people are still unaware of the many different serious and fatal diseases caused by smoking, and most under estimate the very high risks, especially the absolute risk of that smoking kills one of two smokers. As health care professionals taking care of numerous patients suffering from tobacco-induced diseases and other diseases which are aggravated by smoking, we notice that many of them also show a lack of understanding of the tobacco harms and denial and reluctance to quit smoking. We also sadly witness many deaths from tobacco induced diseases in our patients, including those who quit too late, as well as unsatisfactory treatment outcomes due to continuing smoking during treatment.

The FHB proposals on pictorial warnings are weaker than plain packaging first implemented in Australia. Larger and more alarming and shocking warnings will have much stronger effects than the existing warnings which have been unchanged for nearly 10 years. The effects will be much stronger on young people. Some smokers will be prompted to reduce smoking or quit and some former smokers will be reminded not to smoke again. Nonsmokers can also be empowered with the new warnings and knowledge to help family members and friends who smoke to quit, and to avoid secondhand or thirdhand smoke exposure. The large size of the pictorial warnings would reduce, but not eliminate, the attractiveness of the cigarette packs, which have been widely and prominently displayed at retail outlets as advertisements to bypass the existing laws which ban tobacco advertisements. The next steps are plain packaging and banning tobacco product displays totally.

Our Faculty is strongly committed to continue our tobacco control research and to assist the government to evaluate and monitor the effects of the new measures and to advocate for further measures so as to reduce the smoking prevalence to single digit in the next few years. We shall continue to provide the best treatment for our

patients with smoking induced diseases and help smokers quit smoking. I reiterate our strongest support for the FHB proposals and sincerely wish to see fewer patients and deaths arising in Hong Kong from the failure of the government and LegCo to act promptly.



Professor TH Lam

Sir Robert Kotewall Professor in Public Health
Chair Professor in Community Medicine and
Public Health Practice