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EUPHA calls on European governments to move rapidly to implement standardised packaging for cigarettes

Two years on, it is now apparent that the Australian experience with standardized packaging for cigarettes has been an overwhelming success for tobacco control and the arguments of those who criticised its introduction have been comprehensively demolished. In the light of this compelling evidence, the European Public Health Association calls on all European governments to move rapidly to implement this important public health measure. Ireland and England have already committed to doing so, while proposals to follow suit are under active consideration in Norway and Turkey.

Tobacco control has been strengthened by the recent adoption of the Tobacco Products Directive. Yet recent research has demonstrated the massive scale of lobbying by the tobacco industry to weaken its provisions.¹ One early success by the industry and its supporters was the removal of a Europe-wide requirement to distribute cigarettes in standardised packs. These comprise a plain background, most of which is covered by, ideally pictorial, health warnings. The logos and related imagery that the industry has used so effectively to glamorise smoking would not be permitted.

In its submissions to the Australian government the tobacco industry made numerous predictions that standardised packaging would be ineffective in reducing smoking and have several adverse effects, such as increased smuggling and a price war, whereby manufacturers would promote low quality, cheap products that would ultimately increase smoking. None of this has come to pass.

Specifically:

- a) daily smoking prevalence in those aged 14+ in Australia has fallen to its lowest ever level (12.8%)
- b) total smoking prevalence (daily plus less than daily) is now 15.8%, the lowest in the world, ahead of Canada and the USA
- c) tobacco industry funded studies suggesting an absence of an effect on smoking of standardised packaging have been refuted by new studies in peer-reviewed journals.^{2,3}
- d) legal, duty paid imports of tobacco fell by 3.4% between 2012 and 2013
- e) those reporting currently using illicit unbranded tobacco fell from 4.9% (2010) to 3.6% in 2013
- f) support for plain packaging among smokers has risen (28.2% before their introduction to 49% after)
- g) the use of "covers" by smokers to conceal the graphic warnings is negligible

- h) there been no discount price war and, instead, tobacco companies have raised prices far more than the rises in tobacco tax. From August 2011 to February 2013, while excise duty rose by 24¢ for a pack of 25, the tobacco companies share of the cigarette price jumped by \$1.75 to \$7.10. While excise duty had risen 2.8% over the period, the average net price rose by 27%.
- i) on counterfeited packs, BAT Australia, was asked by Sir Cyril Chantler, chair of the UK Government's review of standardised packaging "Have you actually seen a reduction in counterfeit?" and was told by their spokesman Mr Connell "Absolutely. Absolutely".

Finally, it has been argued that any government introducing standardised packaging would have, in effect, acquired the intellectual property of the tobacco companies. This was tested in an action brought by 5 transnational tobacco companies and rejected, by 6 votes to 1, in the Australian High Court.

For these reasons, EUPHA believes that the case for introducing standardised packaging for cigarettes is now overwhelming and calls on Europe's governments to implement it without delay as part of their tobacco control programmes.

Embargo: none

Note to editors: A detailed account of the Australian experience has recently been published (Chapman S, Freeman B. *Removing the emperor's clothes: Australia and tobacco plain packaging*. Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2014) and is now available as a download free e-book at <http://hdl.handle.net/2123/12257>

The European Public Health Association, or EUPHA in short, is an umbrella organisation for public health associations and institutes in Europe. EUPHA was founded in 1992 by 15 members (12 countries). EUPHA now has 71 members from 40 countries:

- 41 national associations of public health
- 18 institutional members
- 8 European NGOs
- 4 individual members.

EUPHA is an international, multidisciplinary, scientific organisation, bringing together around 14,000 public health experts for professional exchange and collaboration throughout Europe. We encourage a multidisciplinary approach to public health.

Our vision is of improved health and reduced health inequalities for all Europeans. We seek to support our members to increase the impact of public health in Europe, adding value to the efforts of regions and states, national and international organisations, and individual public health experts.

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- 1 Costa H, Gilmore AB, Peeters S, McKee M, Stuckler D. Quantifying the influence of tobacco industry on EU governance: automated content analysis of the EU Tobacco Products Directive. *Tobacco Control* 2014; doi:10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2014-051822
 - 2 Diethelm P, McKee M. Tobacco industry funded research on standardised packaging: There are none so blind as those who will not see! *Tobacco Control* 2014; doi:10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2014-051734
 - 3 Lavery AA, Watt HC, Arnott D, et al. Standardised packaging and tobacco-industry funded research. *Lancet* 2014;383:1384.