

## **Plain and standardized tobacco packaging and products: Protecting our children's health from tobacco marketing**

### **What needs to be done?**

The federal government should mandate plain and standardized tobacco packaging and products to reduce the appeal of tobacco. In particular, regulations would protect children and youth from industry marketing tactics.

### **What are we proposing?**

- The Heart and Stroke Foundation is proposing regulations to require plain and standardized tobacco packaging and products that would remove and prohibit all marketing features on the tobacco packaging and the product itself.
- These regulations would standardize tobacco packaging by specifying how the product, brand and manufacturer names would be listed. It would also prescribe the type of fonts, size of text and colours. Standardization would also include specifications for package size, shape, product names, style of opening, material, colour, liners and quantity.
- Regulations should mandate that the colour for cigarette packaging exterior, interior and foil liner be standardized to a matte Pantone 448C and that its shape be standardized to the traditional slide-and-shell format with specific dimensions. Health warnings would remain on tobacco packages, and the traditional slide-and-shell format would allow for the largest and most visible health warnings.
- The regulation would prohibit marketing and promotional features on tobacco packaging exteriors, which include the use of brand specific colours, images, finishes, logos, descriptive words/phrases, distinctive fonts, embossing, and any technology connected to marketing and advertising when scanned by communication devices.
- The policy would likewise prohibit marketing and promotional features on tobacco packaging interiors, which include the use of text, colours, and inserts other than those mandated by the government. Marketing features on foil liners would also be banned, which include embossing, logos, writing and any other designs.
- The standardization of tobacco product packages include those for cigarettes, cigars, cigarillos/little cigars, pipe tobacco, smokeless tobacco or chew, waterpipe tobacco/shisha, loose/roll-your-own tobacco, as well as related products such as cigarette papers, filters, tubes, and blunt wraps/bluntarillos.
- To further restrict marketing potential, the visual appearance of the cigarette itself should be standardized. The policy would define specifications for cigarette shape, size, colour and filters.
- It is recommended that the cigarette colour be standardized to make it unappealing and include messages to support smoking cessation. The shape and size should be standardized to disallow slims and super slims and other appealing formats by establishing minimum size specifications. Marketing and advertising features on the cigarette such as logos, text, embossment, characterizing features and any other enhancements would be banned.

### **Why is this an issue?**

- Despite the fact that smoking rates have declined by more than half, 16% of adult Canadians still smoke and tobacco use continues to be Canada's number one public health threat: it kills 37,000 Canadians every year.
- Given the harmful nature of tobacco use, Canada has already made numerous efforts to limit tobacco marketing, including restrictions on media advertisement, public event sponsorship, and the introduction of

power walls and displays in retail establishments. The product and its package are the most important remaining spaces for tobacco marketing.

- The tobacco industry recognizes that the product and its package are valuable marketing spaces. It uses them as tools to advertise imageries of glamour, sexiness, masculinity, fun and appeal. It successfully renews these imageries by regularly reinventing package and product appearances through innovative and attractive designs, formats, colours, textures, logos, messages, names and fancy papers. These marketing strategies entice new users, create brand loyalty and discourage smokers trying to quit.
- Youth are a particularly impressionable population and a valuable new user group for the tobacco industry. Tobacco companies deliberately design many of their packages and products to target this audience. Studies show that youth respond to such packages, describing them as 'exclusive', 'elegant' and 'sophisticated'. These responses shape positive image associations with tobacco use early on and contribute to tobacco smoking uptake in youth.
- Slim and super slim cigarettes are also a marketing tactic used to convey imageries of glamour that prey on women's insecurities around body image. Research shows that smokers of slims and super slims falsely believe that these cigarettes are not as harmful as regular cigarettes.
- A product that kills more than half of its users should not be allowed to have any attractive qualities.

## **Why this approach?**

- Plain and standardized tobacco packaging and products are essential to the policy solution. Such a policy addresses all forms of tobacco package and product marketing, limiting variability between brands. This regulation will ensure consistency, whereby all brand packages will look the same and equally convey messages warning the user on the harms of tobacco use.
- Removing all marketing and promotional features on, and standardizing the appearance of, tobacco packages and products will render the behavior of smoking less attractive and enticing.
- The Government of Canada has an opportunity to address all remaining forms of tobacco marketing through standardizing all tobacco packages and products. This approach goes beyond the plain packaging efforts in other countries and will position Canada as a leader in tobacco control once again.

## **Why now?**

- Plain and standardized tobacco packaging and products was included in the Liberal Party of Canada's 2015 election platform. It was also included in Prime Minister Trudeau's mandate letter to the Minister of Health. There is clear political support for action on plain packaging.
- Canada was once a global leader in tobacco control. It has since fallen behind as other countries have led the way with innovative and progressive tobacco control policies. Plain and standardized tobacco packaging was implemented in Australia in 2012, and Ireland, France and the United Kingdom have adopted this policy for implementation on May 20, 2016. The policy is also under formal consideration in numerous countries including Norway, Hungary, Sweden, Finland, New Zealand, Singapore, Turkey and South Africa.

## **What are the benefits?**

Evidence indicates that plain and standardized tobacco packaging has a variety of benefits including:

- Curbing deceptive marketing messages.
- Increasing the visibility and effectiveness of health warnings.
- Reducing tobacco use appeal in youth. After the policy's implementation in Australia, positive image association ratings fell for all tobacco brands, and the greatest decline was reported in adolescent smokers.
- Promoting smoking cessation. The policy has been associated with greater rates of thoughts about quitting, concerns around smoking and quit attempts.
- Changing smokers' perceptions. In Australia, more smokers disliked their packs, perceived lower pack appeal, cigarette quality, satisfaction and value. In addition, fewer smokers reported that brands differed in prestige after the policy's introduction.