

7 November 2024



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Dear Sir/Madam

Public Health (Tobacco and Other Products) Amendment (On-Product Health Messages and Other Measures) Regulations 2024

Stroke Foundation is a national charity that partners with the community to prevent stroke, save lives and enhance recovery. We do this through raising awareness, facilitating research, and supporting survivors of stroke. As the voice of stroke in Australia, Stroke Foundation is writing to express our strong support for the proposed amendments prescribing on-product health messages, as a policy response to:

- improve public health by discouraging smoking
- encourage people to give up smoking and stop using regulated tobacco items
- align Australia's tobacco response with Article 11 of the World Health Organisation Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

In 2023, an estimated 45,785 Australians experienced stroke,¹ and there were more than 440,000 survivors of stroke living in our community.¹ Unless action is taken, it is estimated by 2050, Australians will experience almost 72,000 strokes annually.¹

Research indicates that more than 80 percent of strokes can be prevented,² and Stroke Foundation is committed to reducing the number of preventable strokes in Australia.

People who smoke are twice as likely to have a stroke compared with those who have never smoked.³⁻⁶ The more an individual smokes the greater their risk of stroke.⁴

Importantly, an individual's risk of stroke decreases after they quit smoking, and stopping smoking has been shown to have both immediate and long-term health benefits. Two to five years after quitting, there is a large drop in an individual's risk of stroke,⁷ and after 15 years their risk of stroke is similar to that of a person who has never smoked.⁷ As such, Stroke Foundation is strongly supportive of measures to reduce the prevalence of smoking in the Australian community.

The highly successful approach to tobacco control by Australian governments, comprised of public health policy initiatives including health promotion, increased taxation on tobacco products, and tobacco advertising and plain packaging legislation, has had a significant impact on the prevalence of smoking over the last three decades. It is likely that the fall in the prevalence of smoking in the Australian community over the last thirty years, resulting from the Australian Government's tobacco control initiatives, has contributed to the observed reduction in the rate of stroke events over the same period.⁸

Widespread support exists for the presence of health warnings on tobacco packaging, with these warnings becoming increasingly important as people who smoke move closer to quitting. A growing body of research suggests health warnings have an impact on smoking attitudes, intentions and behaviours across broad populations, including more vulnerable groups and amongst young people.⁹ Evidence suggests that while health warnings have a successful impact on awareness of the health effects of smoking, evoke an emotional response from smokers and recent smokers, and increase thinking about quitting, message wear out poses a risk to their ongoing impact.⁹ The proposed opportunity to refresh health warnings in use since 2012, along with requirements of on-product messages to vary between packs to address message fatigue, will provide additional encouragement to support quitting attitudes, intentions and behaviour.

As a member of the Australian Council on Smoking and Health (ACOSH), a leading, independent, Australian tobacco control advocacy organisation, Stroke Foundation supports ACOSH's goal of creating a tobacco-free and vape-free Australia. As such, we endorse the swift timeframe outlined to implement these changes, ensuring that renewed and more targeted messaging can be brought into effect and have an earlier impact on smoking-related outcomes.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into this consultation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lisa Murphy', with a long horizontal flourish extending from the end of the name.

Dr Lisa Murphy
Chief Executive Officer
Stroke Foundation

References

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