



The Royal Australasian
College of Physicians

Opinion piece

Big Tobacco: New lies, same agenda

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Smoking kills. This is a fact. When questioning the effectiveness of tobacco and cigarette plain packaging, arguments built around intellectual property pose the question – why is a company's ability to market a deadly product more important than a human life? You have to ask yourself, is this question worth posing?

Persistent discourse around what some critics perceive to be the failed effectiveness of plain packaging legislation does little to detract from proven and consistent facts from reliable sources. In the 22 months after plain packaging was introduced in December 2012, tobacco and cigarette spending fell by 7.3 per cent, according to [ABS statistics](#)¹.

Until we see clear evidence proving otherwise, it is crucial that we question counter arguments. All too often, these arguments are influenced by Big Tobacco's attempts to erode the very legislation created to reduce death and disease caused by smoking.

And yes, tobacco excise has played a role in smoking rates falling. But why would we criticise this when it has been part of the united solution? It's a simple notion - less people smoking cigarettes means less people dying as a result.

But with smoking rates continuing to fall, who would want to attack life-saving legislation? The answer is Big Tobacco. So it comes as no surprise that the Institute of Public Affairs, which receives Big Tobacco funding, continues to use unreliable data in its arguments to discredit plain packaging.

To say plain packaging has resulted in increased illicit tobacco use is problematic. Health groups have questioned the validity of the internet surveys used in industry studies as part of [KPMG's report on illicit tobacco](#)². These same surveys have been used to form these claims.

Setting the record straight, [Cancer Council Victoria's critique](#)³ outlined that data derived from sources independent of the tobacco industry indicate relatively low and stable levels of illegal tobacco in Australia.

Furthermore, their critique offers alternative estimates on illegal tobacco use in Australia and refers to results from the [2013 National Drug and Alcohol Survey](#)⁴, that suggest a decline since 2007 in the

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2014). Australian National Accounts: National Income, Expenditure and product. Retrieved January 15, from [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/meisubs.nsf/0/C8750AFDEAF39B8CCA257DA2000D2B0D/\\$File/52060_sep%202014.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/meisubs.nsf/0/C8750AFDEAF39B8CCA257DA2000D2B0D/$File/52060_sep%202014.pdf)

² KPMG. (2014). *Illicit Tobacco in Australia*. Retrieved January 15, from https://www.imperial-tobacco.com/files/illicit_trade_h1_2014_report.pdf

³ Cancer Council Victoria. (2014). *How big a problem is illicit tobacco and has it increased since the introduction of plain packaging in Australia—a critique of the KPMG October 2014 half-year report on illicit tobacco in Australia*. Retrieved January 15, from https://www.cancervic.org.au/downloads/plainfacts/Nov14critique_of_KPMG13Oct2014HalfYear.pdf

percentage of smokers who are aware of unbranded tobacco, who have ever smoked it and who currently use it.

Yet time and time again we see Big Tobacco quick to laud dubious evidence in its arguments that plain packaging has failed.

Plain packaging laws are absolutely necessary. They and play a pivotal role as part of a raft of measures designed to help smokers quit. Importantly they prevent people from taking up smoking and as a result, less people die and suffer from smoking-related disease.

The opinion piece by [Simon Breheny](#)⁵, Legal Rights Project director at the Institute of Public Affairs, is just the latest example of a Big Tobacco smoke and mirror job. Will it be Big Tobacco's last attempt at peddling their message that plain packaging does not work? Certainly not. Will their attempts undermine the fact that preventing people from smoking saves lives? Never.

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⁴ Cancer Council Victoria. (2014). How big a problem is illicit tobacco and has it increased since the introduction of plain packaging in Australia—a critique of the KPMG October 2014 half-year report on illicit tobacco in Australia. Retrieved January 15, from https://www.cancervic.org.au/downloads/plainfacts/Nov14critique_of_KPMG13Oct2014HalfYear.pdf

⁵ The Daily Telegraph. (2015). Give cigarette pack laws the chop chop. Retrieved January 15 from <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/opinion/give-cigarette-pack-laws-the-chop-chop/story-fni0cwi5-1227183749741>