Long-term Benefit of Increasing the Prominence of a Quitline Number on Cigarette Packaging

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Background

In 2008, New Zealand (NZ) required tobacco packages to include pictorial health warnings (PHWs) and the national Quitline number.1 Previously, text-only health warnings provided a telephone number, but did not explicitly link this to the “Quitline”. Research indicated that NZ smokers became more aware of the Quitline number on packs since PHWs were introduced2 and there was an increase in the proportion of new callers who registered with the Quitline immediately following the introduction of PHWs.3 We investigated whether Quitline callers’ use of packaging to source the Quitline number continued beyond the introduction of PHWs.

Methods

The national Quitline service in NZ routinely collects data on where new callers sourced the Quitline number. We examined the proportion of new callers who reported obtaining the Quitline number from cigarette packets before and after the introduction of PHWs. These estimates were compared to the proportion of callers who cited television advertising as the source of this number.

Results

During the 12-month pre-PHW period (March 2007 to February 2008), 7.5% and 34.9% of new callers (out of n=19,558 total callers), cited tobacco packaging and television advertising respectively as their source for the Quitline number (Figure 1). However, in the first full year of the new PHWs (March 2008 to February 2009), the proportions reporting tobacco packets as the source increased to 26.4% and television advertising declined to 27.1% (out of n=20,152 total callers). The same pattern was still evident in the subsequent 12-month period at 22.9% and 23.3% respectively (n=18,309 for the period March 2009 to February 2010).

The proportions of Māori and Pacific callers citing tobacco packaging were similar to that for the overall caller population. That is for the last of the three time periods: 21.3% for Māori, 25.9% for Pacific and 23.2% for European/Other callers.

Discussion

These findings suggest that promoting a quitline number more clearly on tobacco packaging increases its salience for smokers of different ethnic groups. The NZ data are consistent with the experience in Australia, Brazil and Singapore, where such calls also increased after PHWs featured a quitline number (see elsewhere for references and additional details4).

Interestingly, the results observed in NZ occurred despite the relatively small size of the Quitline number, which is superimposed on the PHWs, resulting in visual clutter with some PHWs (see Figure 2). Improving warning design, including placing of the PHW and Quitline number on the front of tobacco packages, could further facilitate smokers’ use of this zero-cost means of promoting cessation.

References


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