

Smokers want government action

Most smokers support more tobacco regulation, more smokefree policies and a dedicated tobacco tax: National survey data from New Zealand

George Thomson (1),* Nick Wilson (1), Richard Edwards (1), Deepa Weerasekera (1), Chris Bullen (2) on behalf of the ITC Project Team (NZ arm)

(1) Health Promotion and Policy Research Unit, Department of Public Health, University of Otago, Wellington, New Zealand
(2) Clinical Trials Research Unit, School of Population Health, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand

* Contact for further information: george.thomson@otago.ac.nz

Background

New Zealand (NZ) has very large ethnic and socioeconomic variations in smoking prevalence, with Māori prevalence over twice that of non-Māori.¹

Aims

To present key policy-relevant results from Wave 1 of the International Tobacco Control (ITC) Project survey of New Zealand (NZ) smokers.

Methods

Wave 1 interviewed 1376 smokers aged 18+ years from March 2007 to February 2008. Results were weighted to reflect the national population of smokers. Further details on the survey methods are available elsewhere.²

'Smoking-induced deprivation' was defined as a positive response to the question 'Have you spent money on cigarettes that you knew would be better spent on household essentials like food?' 'Financial stress' was defined as having been unable to pay important bills on time due to lack of money in last month.'

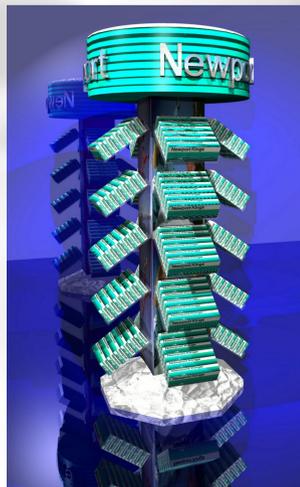
Results

60% support for a ban on point-of-sale tobacco displays.

Those more likely to support a ban suffered financial stress (odds ratio (OR)=1.6), were planning to quit in the next month (OR=2.2) or had quit since the Health Survey (OR=2.4).

65% support for additional tobacco industry and product regulation:

There was statistically significantly higher support from Māori (OR=1.7), Pacific Islands people (OR=3.2), socio-economically deprived smokers (OR=1.9) and smokers experiencing financial stress (OR=2.6).



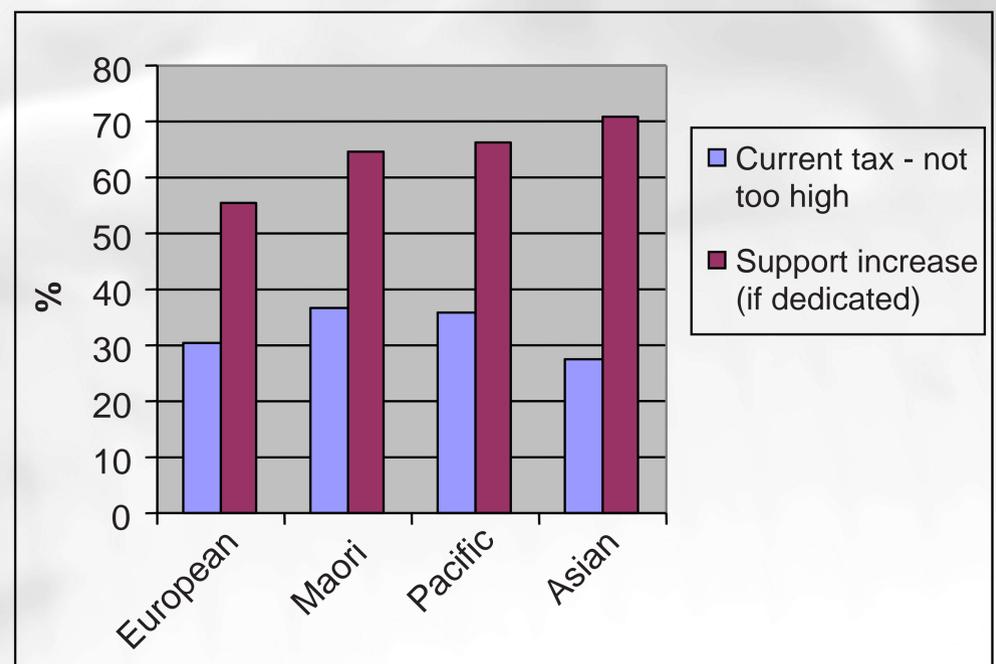
Majority support for additional smokefree laws: for cars with pre-school children (96%); outdoor eating areas (78%); and council playgrounds (68%).

59% support for dedicated tobacco taxes: 59% supported an increase in tobacco tax if all the extra revenue 'was used to promote healthy lifestyles, including helping smokers wanting to quit'.



This support was higher for: Māori compared to compared to all other ethnic groups (adjusted odds ratio [aOR]=1.60, 95%CI=1.13–2.25) – see Figure 1; and for those suffering 'smoking-induced deprivation' (aOR=1.68,95%CI=1.10–2.55).

Figure 1: Support from ethnic groups for tobacco tax and dedicated tax rises



Discussion

New Zealand policymakers now have evidence of considerable smoker support for further action.

Higher support for dedicated tax revenue by the more deprived smokers indicates that smokers' desire for quitting support outweighs short-term financial self-interest.

The possible adverse effect on the poor from tax rises has been a political obstacle to such increases in some settings. So these findings make a dedicated tobacco tax (ie, earmarked for quitting support and health promotion) more achievable.

Funding and acknowledgements

The ITC Project (NZ) team thank: the interviewees who kindly contributed their time; the Health Research Council of New Zealand which has provided the core funding for this Project; and our other project partners (see:<http://wnmeds.ac.nz/itcproject.html>).

References

1. Ponniah, Bloomfield. *N Z Med J.* 2008;121:34-42
2. Methods Report. See:<http://wnmeds.ac.nz/itcproject.html>