

# Achieving the tobacco endgame

## The case for removing additives:

### Findings from the ITC New Zealand Survey

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## Background

Ready-made cigarette and roll-your-own tobacco products can contain a range of flavour additives such as spice, herb, alcohol, candy, menthol or vanilla. These flavours are designed to reduce the harshness of tobacco smoke and enhance its taste, making it easier for new smokers (in particular young people) to become addicted or existing smokers to maintain their addiction. A recently released New Zealand (NZ) national action plan identified removal of tobacco flavouring additives as an important strategy to reduce the appeal of smoked tobacco and help achieve New Zealand's 2025 endgame goal.

## Research questions

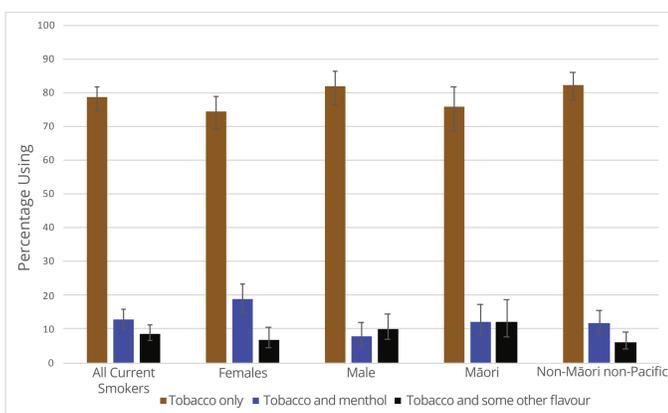
- 1 What is the prevalence of use of flavoured tobacco in New Zealand?
- 2 Do New Zealand smokers support banning flavour additives from tobacco products?

## Results:

### Use of flavoured tobacco

Smoking 'just tobacco' with no flavourings was by far the most frequent pattern across all groups (Figure 1). However, over a fifth (22%) of all current smokers were using tobacco with menthol or other flavourings. Females (19%) were twice as likely as males (8%) to use menthols. Prevalence of menthol and other tobacco flavour use among Māori was similar to non-Māori/Pacific smokers. Menthol and other flavour use was similar across all age groups (data not shown), however this finding should be treated with caution due to small sample sizes in some age groups.

Figure 1. Type of flavoured tobacco used by gender and ethnicity



### Attitudes towards banning flavouring additives

Among those who used menthol flavoured tobacco, just under half (45%) reported they would quit smoking entirely if menthols were banned. A further quarter (25%) said they would switch to a non-menthol brand.

There was at least 50% support across all age groups for banning all tobacco additives (including flavours). Support for banning additives was lower among those who used menthols (45%) or tobacco with other flavourings (38%), however these differences were not statistically significant (Figure 2), possibly due to the small numbers of smokers using flavoured products.

## Conclusions

A substantial proportion of smokers use flavoured tobacco products, with use particularly high among females. Users of menthol or other flavoured tobacco were more likely to report smoking their brands because of taste, suggesting that flavour additives continue to play an important role in recruiting new smokers and encouraging continued smoking among existing smokers. This finding, together with the reasonable support among smokers for the removal of tobacco additives and the high proportion of menthol users who indicated they would quit if menthols were banned, suggests that there is a good case for removing tobacco flavourings to help achieve NZ's Smokefree 2025 goal.

## Methods:

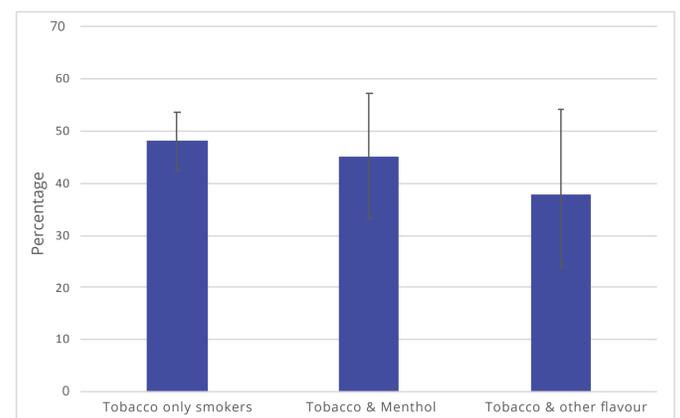
We used data from the first wave (Aug 2016-April 2017) of the NZ International Tobacco Control survey (ITC-NZ). The ITC sample list was drawn from people who had previously participated in the New Zealand Health Survey (NZHS) and who had agreed to be re-contacted for future research. ITC-NZ inclusion criteria were that people had participated in the NZHS within the last year, were 18 or older, and were smokers or recent quitters (quit within last 12 months at time of NZHS).

Interviews were conducted using computer aided telephone interviewing. The final sample of 1082 included 825 smokers of whom 296 identified as Māori (indigenous peoples of NZ). A 28% response rate was achieved (22% after allowing for non-response within the NZHS). Analysis accounted for over-sampling of age and ethnicity groups in the NZHS/ITC-NZ sampling stages. Participants who refused to answer key questions or responded "don't know" were excluded from these analyses.

### Perceptions of flavoured tobacco products

Menthol (82%) and other flavoured tobacco (87%) users were more likely to report they smoke their chosen brand "because of the taste" than those who smoked tobacco with no flavour additives (64%). Only 10% of menthol smokers reported that they thought menthol cigarettes were less harmful than regular cigarettes (82% disagreed, 8% not sure).

Figure 2. Support for banning all tobacco flavouring additives by type of flavoured tobacco used



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