

# Standardized or Plain Tobacco Packaging

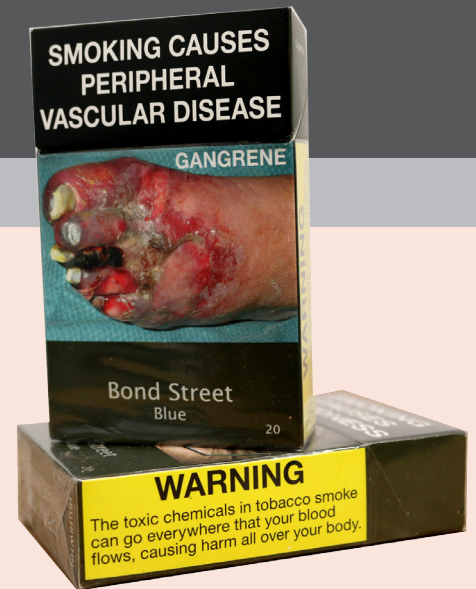
## Scientific Evidence

**T**obacco companies rely on tobacco pack design as a critical form of marketing. The companies exploit all elements of packaging, including the construction, outer film, tear tape, inner frame, pack inserts and onserts, branding information, and color scheme.<sup>1</sup> As part of a comprehensive set of tobacco control measures to reduce smoking rates, laws that mandate standardized or “plain” packaging for tobacco products are intended to reduce the attractiveness and appeal of tobacco products to consumers, increase the noticeability and effectiveness of health warnings, and reduce the ability of the tobacco product and its packaging to mislead consumers about the harms of smoking.

The Government of Australia was the first country in the world to introduce and implement plain packaging for tobacco products. Research has begun to document the early impact of the law since its implementation in December 2012, summarized by Cancer Council Victoria.<sup>2</sup>

## Plain Packaging Reduces the Appeal of Tobacco Products

- Over the phase-in period for plain packs, smokers of plain packs in Victoria, Australia:
  - perceived their cigarettes to be of lower quality and less appealing than smokers of fully branded packs; and
  - reported being more likely to think about and prioritize quitting than smokers of branded packs.<sup>3</sup>
- One year following implementation of plain packaging, more smokers of cigarettes from plain packs in Australia disliked their pack and perceived lower pack appeal, lower cigarette quality, lower satisfaction, and lower value. Smokers of plain packs also did not agree that brands differed in prestige.<sup>4</sup>
- The majority of a large sample of adult smokers in the New South Wales, Australia reported a significant increase in strong negative perceptions about their packs in the months following implementation of plain packaging, including significant disagreement that the packs are attractive and fashionable, and that packs influence their choice of brand.<sup>5</sup>
- Among Australian adolescents who had seen packs in the previous six months, the appeal of cigarettes packs and cigarette brands decreased significantly following the introduction of plain packaging:
  - Compared with pre-implementation, Australian adolescents reported higher levels of uncertainty regarding whether brands differed in their ease of being smoked and disagreement that some brands have better looking packs.<sup>6</sup>

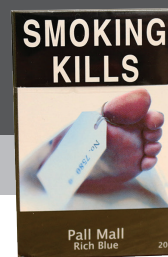
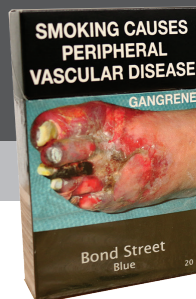


**Standardized or “Plain” Packaging of Tobacco** requires that packaging has a uniform plain color and texture; mandates standard shape, size and materials of packs; and prohibits any branding, logos or other promotional elements on, inside or attached to the packaging or on individual products. Only the brand name, product name, quantity of product and contact details may appear on packaging, in a standard typeface, together with other mandatory information such as health warnings and tax stamps.



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## Scientific Evidence



### Plain Packaging Increases the Noticeability and Effectiveness of Health Warnings

- A national study measuring Australian smokers' reactions to the health warnings on plain packs found that they focused on the larger warnings and noticed them more than they did prior to implementation of the policy, and that the warnings promoted thoughts about the risks of smoking; a reaction that relates to increased quit attempts.<sup>7</sup>
- A national survey measuring Australian smokers' responses one year post-implementation found that more adult smokers noticed graphic health warnings and attributed their motivation to quit to the warnings, avoided specific health warnings when purchasing cigarettes, and covered packs, compared with smokers prior to implementation of plain packaging.<sup>4</sup>
- Smokers in New South Wales, Australia noticed health warnings more after the introduction of plain packs and said that the health warnings were having an impact:
  - Smokers were more likely to report thoughts and worries about quitting, seeing only the warnings on the packs, and feeling like they should hide their packs.
- The plain packs also appeared to reverse a decline over time in the impact of the previous smaller warnings, with smokers' responses being comparable to those measured at the time health warnings first appeared on packs.<sup>5</sup>
- Among a large sample of Australian adult smokers:
  - plain packaging with larger graphic health warnings increased short-term rates of quit intentions, pack avoidance, smokers' stopping themselves from smoking, and quit attempts during the phase-in period, as well as increased levels of pack avoidance, stubbing out prematurely, and quit attempts in the first year of implementation.<sup>8</sup>
  - reduced appeal, increased effectiveness of graphic health warnings, and greater perceived harm in response to plain packs also predicted subsequent changes one month later in each of these quitting-related thoughts and behaviors.<sup>9</sup>

### Plain Packaging Appears to be Having Effects on Smoker Attitudes and Behaviors

- Over the phase-in period for plain packaging, smokers of plain packs in Victoria, Australia were more likely to support the government's plain packaging policy than smokers of fully branded packs.<sup>3</sup>
- An observational study at outdoor café strips following the implementation of plain packaging recorded a decrease in smoking in these venues and a decrease in the number of packs that were clearly visible on tables. A small number of smokers also actively concealed their packs.<sup>11</sup>
  - The follow-up observational study one year later showed a sustained reduction in visible smoking and pack display at outdoor café strips. The sustained reduction suggests that plain packaging may be changing norms about smoking in public.<sup>12</sup>

## Key Messages

- Tobacco companies use tobacco packaging as a critical form of product marketing.
- Standardized or “plain” packaging reduces the attractiveness and appeal of tobacco products, and increases the noticeability and effectiveness of health warnings.
- Guidelines for Articles 11 and 13 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control recommend that Parties consider adopting plain packaging to eliminate advertising or promotion, including design features that make products attractive.

1. Henriksen L. Comprehensive tobacco marketing restrictions: promotion, packaging, price and place. *Tobacco Control*. 2012; 21:147-153. 2. Cancer Council of Victoria. Facts sheet no. 1: What has been the impact of legislation to standardise the packaging of tobacco products in Australia? Oct 2015. Available from [www.cancerciv.org.au/downloads/plainfacts/Facts\\_sheets/Facts\\_Sheet\\_no\\_1\\_Impact\\_PP\\_legis\\_Oct2015.pdf](http://www.cancerciv.org.au/downloads/plainfacts/Facts_sheets/Facts_Sheet_no_1_Impact_PP_legis_Oct2015.pdf). 3. Wakefield MA, Hayes L, Durkin S, and Borland R. Introduction effects of the Australian plain packaging policy on adult smokers: a cross-sectional study. *BMJ Open*. 2013; 3(7). Available from [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23878174](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23878174). 4. Wakefield M, Coomber K, Zacher M, Durkin S, Brennan E, et al. Australian adult smokers' responses to plain packaging with larger graphic health warnings 1 year after implementation: results from a national cross-sectional tracking survey. *Tobacco Control*. 2015; 24:i17-i25. Available from [tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/24/Suppl\\_2/i17.full](http://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/24/Suppl_2/i17.full). 5. Dunlop SM, Dobbins T, Young JM, Perez D, and Currow DC. Impact of Australia's introduction of tobacco plain packs on adult smokers' pack-related perceptions and responses: results from a continuous tracking survey. *BMJ Open*. 2014; 4(12). Available from [bmjopen.bmj.com/content/4/12/e005836.abstract](http://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/4/12/e005836.abstract). 6. White V, Williams T, and Wakefield M. Has the introduction of plain packaging with larger graphic health warnings changed adolescents' perceptions of cigarette packs and brands? *Tobacco Control*. 2015; 24:i42-i49. Available from [tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/24/Suppl\\_2/i42.full](http://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/24/Suppl_2/i42.full). 7. Yong H-H, Borland R, Hammond D, Thrasher JF, Cummings KM, et al. Smokers' reactions to the new larger health warning labels on plain cigarette packs in Australia: findings from the ITC Australia project. *Tobacco Control*. 2015. Available from [tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/early/2015/02/19/tobaccocontrol-2014-051979.abstract](http://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/early/2015/02/19/tobaccocontrol-2014-051979.abstract). 8. Durkin S, Brennan E, Coomber K, Zacher M, Scollo M, et al. Short-term changes in quitting-related cognitions and behaviours after the implementation of plain packaging with larger health warnings: findings from a national cohort study with Australian adult smokers. *Tobacco Control*. 2015; 24:i26-i32. Available from [tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/24/Suppl\\_2/i26.full](http://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/24/Suppl_2/i26.full). 9. Brennan E, Durkin S, Coomber K, Zacher M, Scollo M, et al. Are quitting-related cognitions and behaviours predicted by proximal responses to plain packaging with larger health warnings? Findings from a national cohort study with Australian adult smokers. *Tobacco Control*. 2015; 24:i33-i41. Available from [tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/24/Suppl\\_2/i33.full](http://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/24/Suppl_2/i33.full). 10. White V, Williams T, Faulkner A, and Wakefield M. Do larger graphic health warnings on standardised cigarette packs increase adolescents' cognitive processing of consumer health information and beliefs about smoking-related harms? *Tobacco Control*. 2015; 24:i50-i57. Available from [tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/24/Suppl\\_2/i50.full](http://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/24/Suppl_2/i50.full). 11. Zacher M, Bayly M, Brennan E, Dono J, Miller C, et al. Personal tobacco pack display before and after the introduction of plain packaging with larger pictorial health warnings in Australia: an observational study of outdoor café strips. *Addiction*. 2014; 109(4):653-62. Available from [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24428427](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24428427). 12. Zacher M, Bayly M, Brennan E, Dono J, Miller C, et al. Personal pack display and active smoking at outdoor café strips: assessing the impact of plain packaging 1 year postimplementation. *Tobacco Control*. 2015; 24:i94-i97. Available from [tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/24/Suppl\\_2/i94.full](http://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/24/Suppl_2/i94.full).