Smoking: Low income families

- Smoking rates are much higher amongst disadvantaged groups.
- Over 1.5 million households in poverty include an adult who smokes.
- Half a million households could be brought out of poverty if they quit.
- Children from low income families are more likely to be exposed to secondhand smoke in the home.

The poorer you are, the more likely you are to smoke

Smoking is the single biggest cause of premature death in the UK and is responsible for half the difference in life expectancy between the rich and poor.

Whilst smoking rates among the general population have declined, they remain higher in lower socio-economic groups.

High smoking rates are also linked to many other indicators of disadvantage including unemployment, low educational attainment and mental health problems.

Smoking and Poverty

In 2015 the average smoking household tobacco expenditure was £41.50 per week, equalling £2,158 a year (Reed, 2015).

People in the lowest social groups are likely to be heavier smokers. Smokers in routine and manual occupations smoke on average 20% more than those in managerial and professional occupations (HSCIC, 2014).

ASH research shows that in the UK 1.7 million households which include a smoker are currently in poverty but around 28% (over half a million) could be lifted out of poverty if they stopped smoking. This means 365,000 fewer children could be living below the poverty line (ASH, 2015).

The impact of cigarette smoking on household, child and adult poverty* in the UK (ASH, Smoking Still Kills, 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Currently in poverty</th>
<th>Lifted out of poverty if smoking costs removed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Households with smokers</td>
<td>1,788,000</td>
<td>512,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children in households with smokers</td>
<td>1,244,000</td>
<td>365,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults in households with smokers</td>
<td>3,192,000</td>
<td>866,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Poverty defined as income below 60% of median household net income, adjusted for family size
Secondhand smoke

Not only do people with low incomes spend a higher proportion of their income on cigarettes but exposure to secondhand smoke (SHS) is higher in more deprived homes. The 2015 ASH Smokefree GB survey found that in Great Britain 25% of the least advantaged allowed smoking in their home, compared with 10% of the most advantaged.

Children are particularly vulnerable to the damaging effects of SHS. For example, the Royal College of Physicians estimates that household smoking increases rates of childhood asthma by as much as 50%.

Children with a parent who smokes are also up to 3x more likely to go on to smoke. It is estimated that each year at least 23,000 young people in England and Wales start smoking by the age of 15 as a result of exposure to smoking in the home (RCP, 2010).

Further impacts of smoking on low income families

Smoking is the most common cause of accidental fire. A disproportionate number occur in deprived areas, amongst groups with uncertain employment and from low-rent social housing (London Fire Brigade, 2013).

Cheap illegal tobacco is more commonly used by people in disadvantaged communities. It facilitates teens smoking and exposes communities to organised crime.

Action to reduce smoking

1. Target stop smoking support: There is good evidence that local stop smoking services can reduce smoking inequalities by improving the chances of a successful quit attempt.
2. Tackle illegal tobacco. Cheap illegal tobacco fuels teen smoking, worsens health inequalities and is linked to crime. Local authorities should work collaboratively across regions with each other, police and HMRC to reduce the demand and supply of tobacco
3. Explore innovative ways to reach smokers in financial hardship, e.g. via housing associations and debt advice.
4. Support national action. Some of the most effective measures to tackle smoking in poor communities happen at a national level, in particular raising the price of tobacco through taxation and mass media campaigns