

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Smoking and Health

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Politicians urge the Government to commit to putting tobacco products in standardised packaging

Today on Valentine's Day, almost six months since the Government's consultation on standard packs ended, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Smoking and Health [1] is calling on the Government to commit to legislation to put all cigarettes in standard packaging.

This Valentine's Day marks seven years since the House of Commons voted for smokefree legislation; a measure which has helped to save lives by protecting millions of people from the dangers of secondhand smoke [2, 3].

Today is also the 10th anniversary of the start of the tobacco advertising ban, which prohibited most forms of tobacco advertising and promotion, including advertising in print media and billboards.

However, ten years on, cigarette packs are still being used to promote the product, attracting 430 children in the UK to become smokers every day. This amounts to a shocking 78,500 children who have started smoking since the Government's consultation on standard packs ended.

Stephen Williams, Chair of the APPG on smoking and health said:

"It's shocking that over 78,000 children have started smoking since the consultation on standard packaging closed six months ago, with only half of them likely to stop before they die. There is cross-party support for standardised tobacco packaging. We need to take action now before even more children are enticed into smoking, too young to understand the meaning of addiction and the health consequences of their newly acquired habit."

Kevin Barron MP, commented:

"There's a reason why the tobacco industry spends thousands of pounds each year on making their packs more attractive: it works. So it's not surprising that they're desperately trying to prevent standardised packs being introduced. Standard tobacco packaging will stop the public being misled about the dangers of smoking and will make cigarettes less attractive to young people."

Bob Blackman MP said:

“Australia has shown how easy introducing standard packaging can be – it’s time we followed suit. MPs from all parties agree that we need to put an end to the promotion of cigarettes to young people through glitzy packs. We’ve got a great reputation in this country for protecting children from the dangers of smoking – now it’s time to build on this success.”

Cigarette packs are attractive and misleading, especially to children. [4] Smoking has been shown to be a childhood addiction, not an adult choice [5] and it is therefore critical that standardised packaging is introduced to protect children from the lure of cigarette packets, before more are enticed into becoming addicted to a habit that kills half of its lifelong users.

Introducing standard packaging for tobacco products in the UK would be cheap and easy to implement [6]. The measure has already been introduced in Australia, where retailers found it straightforward to introduce [7]; and there is no evidence that their introduction will increase smuggling [8], contrary to the views of some tobacco companies.

There is also strong support for standard packaging from the public [9], the public health community [10], and across parties at Westminster.

The Government has a massive opportunity to build on the huge achievements that the UK has made towards protecting children from the harm of smoking: now is the time to take further action.

ENDS

For further information, please contact Amanda Sandford or Katy Scammel on 020 7404 0242

Hi-res images of Stephen Williams MP, chair of the APPG on Smoking and Health, Bob Blackman MP, secretary of the APPG on Smoking and Health, and Kevin Baron MP, vice-chair of the APPG on Smoking and Health can be downloaded as a zip file (19MB) by using this URL: www.ash.org.uk/APPG.zip

Image 2701 – Stephen Williams; Image 2712 – Kevin Barron; Image 2715 – Bob Blackman;
Image 2703 – All 3 MPs, from L-R: K Barron, S Williams, B Blackman

Notes to editors

1. The All Party Parliamentary Group on Smoking and Health is a cross-party group of peers and MPs which was founded in 1976 and is currently chaired by Stephen Williams MP. Its

agreed purpose is to monitor and discuss the health and social effects of smoking; to assess the latest medical techniques to assist in smoking cessation; and to act as a resource for the groups' members on all issues relating to smoking and public health.

2. In England, the smoke free legislation resulted in a 2.4% drop in admissions to hospital for heart attacks, equivalent to 1,200 fewer emergency admissions in the year following the smokefree law. Reference: Sims, M et al. Short term impact of smoke-free legislation in England: retrospective analysis of hospital admissions for myocardial infarction. *BMJ*. 2010 Jun 8;340:c2161. Doi: 10.1136/bmj.c2161

3. There was a 12% fall in hospital admissions for childhood asthma during the year following the public places smoking ban. Reference: Millet C et al. Hospital Admissions for Childhood Asthma After Smoke-Free Legislation in England. *Pediatrics*; originally published online January 21, 2013; DOI: 10.1542/peds.2012-2592

4. For information on how cigarette packaging is misleading and attractive, see evidence summarised in the [PHRC report](#), published on the launch of the consultation

5. Two thirds of smokers become addicted before the age of 18 and 39% under 16. See data from the [General Lifestyle Survey](#)

6. Standard packs are a regulatory measure which only requires changes in packaging and these changes will reduce the manufacturers' costs of production

7. See [Youtube clip](#) showing purchase of cigarettes in Australian retailer after implementation of the legislation, backed up by research evidence from Carter OBJ, Mills BW, Phan T, Bremner JR: [Measuring the effect of cigarette plain packaging on transaction times and selection errors in a simulation experiment](#). *Tobacco Control*, 2011, doi 10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2011-050087).

8. [Smuggling the tobacco industry and plain packs](#). A report by Luk Joossens for Cancer Research UK.

9. A poll by YouGov for ASH found that overall 62% of adults in England supported this while just 11% opposed the measure. Even among smokers, for every 5 who oppose there are 6 who support. Total sample size was 10,000 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 27th February and 16th March 2012. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all adults (aged 18+) in England.

10. [The Smokefree Action Coalition](#) is an alliance of over 190 health organisations including medical royal colleges, the BMA, the Trading Standards Institute, the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, the Faculty of Public Health, the Association of Directors of Public Health and ASH: all support the introduction of standard packs.