

The Rt Hon Keir Starmer MP
The Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 0AA

Monday 8th July 2024

Dear Prime Minister

We are writing to welcome you to your new role and thank you for your government's commitment to focus on prevention throughout the healthcare system, to deliver productivity growth in every part of the country, and to halve the difference in healthy life expectancy between the richest and poorest regions. By ending smoking, which is responsible for half the difference in healthy life expectancy between rich and poor, you can deliver on all these objectives.

To that end reintroduction of the Tobacco and Vapes Bill and publication of the Roadmap to a Smoke-free Britain must be front and centre of the King's Speech on 17th July. This is the firm view of the health community as set out in a letter published today in the BMJ endorsed by over 1,000 leading charities, medical royal colleges, doctors, academics, healthcare workers and public health professionals.

Open Letter to the PM and SoS for Health in the BMJ 8th July 2024

We urge the Labour government to put reintroduction of the Tobacco and Vapes Bill and publication of its Roadmap to a Smoke-free Britain front and centre when it sets out its priorities for the parliamentary session in the King's speech.

The last Labour Government launched Smoking Kills, the first cross-government tobacco control plan, a year after coming to power in 1997. This drove substantial declines in smoking among adults and children after two decades when little or no progress had been made.

Yet smoking is still the single biggest cause of preventable death, responsible for half the difference in life expectancy between rich and poor in our society. Labour cannot achieve its manifesto commitment to halve differences in healthy life expectancy between the richest and poorest regions unless it prioritises ending smoking.

While most smokers still start as children, every day 350 young adults start smoking, risking a lifetime of addiction, disease and premature death. Smoking puts pressure on our NHS and social care system, but the greatest financial impact is due to lost productivity. The estimated cost to the UK economy in 2023 was £55 billion, made up of £2.2 billion to the NHS, £18 billion in social care costs, and £34 billion in lost productivity.

Labour backed the Tobacco and Vapes Bill in opposition and in its manifesto. Indeed, phasing out smoking was a policy put forward by Labour before the Conservative Prime Minister introduced the legislation. The Bill already passed at second reading, was scrutinised effectively in Committee, and would have passed by summer recess if the election had not been called.

There is no time to waste. Measures to prevent vapes being marketed to children are urgently needed, while ensuring they remain accessible as an effective quitting aid for adult smokers. We are already three years behind where we would have been if the tough regulations on vaping that Labour tabled in 2021 had not been voted down by the then government.

Britain was the birthplace of the tobacco industry, an industry which killed over 100 million people in the twentieth century and is on track to kill 1 billion in the twenty-first, mainly in low and middle-income countries. The UK now has the chance to lead the world in phasing out smoking. The new government must seize it with both hands.

Yours faithfully



Professor Nick Hopkinson,
Chair, Action on Smoking and Health, The Foundry, 17 Oval Way, London, SE11 5RR
n.hopkinson@imperial.ac.uk

On behalf of the following and an additional 1379 signatories to the letter to the BMJ. Full list available at <https://ash.org.uk/uploads/Signatures-BMJlet-July2024.pdf>

1. Sarah Woolnough, Chief Executive, The King's Fund
2. Prof Sir Mike Richards, former National Cancer Director at the Department of Health and Chair of the UK National Screening Committee
3. Dr Jeanette Dickson, Chair of Council, Academy of Medical Royal Colleges
4. Professor Dame Carol Black, chair, Centre for Ageing Better and former President of the RCP
5. Mark Rowland, Chief Executive of the Mental Health Foundation
6. Professor Linda Bauld, Director of the SPECTRUM public health research consortium
7. Dr Chris Van Tulleken, University College Hospital
8. Greg Fell, President of the Association of Directors of Public Health
9. Prof Sanjay Agrawal, the Royal College of Physicians' special adviser on tobacco
10. Tim Mitchell, President, Royal College of Surgeons of England
11. Dr Raneek Thakar, President, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
12. Professor Kamila Hawthorne, Chair of the Royal College of General Practitioners
13. Dr Ed Beveridge, Presidential Lead for Physical Health, Royal College of Psychiatrists
14. Professor Kevin Fenton, President, Faculty of Public Health
15. John Herriman, Chief Executive, Chartered Trading Standards Institute
16. Sarah Sleet, Chief Executive, Asthma + Lung UK
17. Dr Charmaine Griffiths, Chief Executive, British Heart Foundation
18. Ian Walker, Executive Director of Policy Information and Communications, Cancer Research UK
19. Dr Paul Walker, Chair, British Thoracic Society
20. Colette Marshall, Chief Executive, Diabetes UK
21. Jenny Ward, Chief Executive, The Lullaby Trust
22. Duleep Allirajah, Chief Executive, The Richmond Group of Charities
23. William Roberts, CEO, Royal Society for Public Health
24. Dr Clea Harmer, Chief Executive, Sands, Co-Chair, Smoking in Pregnancy Challenge Group
25. Dr Andy McEwen, Chief Executive, National Centre for Smoking Cessation and Training
26. Professor David Strain, Chair, BMA Board of Science Committee and Dr Penny Toff, Chair, BMA Public Health Medicine Committee
27. Alison Morton, CEO, Institute of Health Visiting

28. Deborah Alsina MBE, Chief Executive of Versus Arthritis
29. Andy Bell, CEO, Centre for Mental Health
30. Samantha Benham Hermetz, Executive Director of Policy & Communications, Alzheimer's Research UK
31. Tricia Bryant, Executive Director and Head of Operations, Primary Care Respiratory Society
32. Ailsa Rutter, Director, Fresh and Balance
33. Dr Sarah McNulty, Director of Public Health for Knowsley, Lead Director for All Together Smokefree, Champs Public Health Collaborative
34. Professor Dame Clare Gerada former chair of council and President of the RCGP
35. Emeritus Professor Sir Cyril Chantler, author of Chantler report on the standardised packaging of tobacco products