Ending smoking in Yorkshire and Humber could lift over 117,000 people out of poverty

Analysis of Government data carried out for Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) finds that the deadly addiction of tobacco, and the enormous profits of the tobacco industry, drives over 117,000 people into poverty in Yorkshire and Humber [1].

Seven out of ten adult smokers want to stop smoking, and three quarters regret ever having started [2], but most did so as children, before realising how hard it is to quit [3]. More than two thirds of those who try smoking go on to become regular smokers [4], developing an expensive and often lifelong addiction causing disease, disability and premature death.

Our analysis shows that as a direct result of the cost of tobacco addiction:

- 41,000 additional households in Yorkshire and Humber are living in poverty
- 117,000 people, including 26,000 children, have been driven into poverty
- 20,000 pensioners are living in poverty, increasing the proportion of pensioners (with at least one smoker in the household) in poverty from 15.35% to 31.50%.

Without the costs of smoking, poverty rates would reduce from over a third (36%) of households which include at least one smoker to around one in five (25%).

This poverty suffered by many smokers is matched by the enormous profits made by the tobacco industry:

- The four largest tobacco transnationals (British American Tobacco, Imperial Tobacco, Japan Tobacco International and Philip Morris International) make over £1.5 billion in profits per annum in the UK alone [5]
- British American Tobacco has rewarded its departing CEO, Nicandro Durante, with a ‘golden parachute’ of £7.5m as part of his September 2019 exit package [6]

Deborah Arnott, Chief Executive of ASH said:

> High tobacco prices can help smokers quit and stop young people start smoking, but poorer smokers find it harder to quit. Worse still they are disproportionately disadvantaged if they don’t, because of their smaller incomes.

> That’s why it’s vital that all smokers are given the support they need to quit, funded by a ‘polluter pays’ approach. This would force the extremely profitable transnational tobacco companies to pay to end smoking.

Alison Dunn, CEO Citizens Advice Gateshead, said:

> “Tackling poverty is complex, requiring legislative and social change. Too many people in our communities are living in poverty, with many households including children facing preventable inequalities.

> The cost of tobacco pushes hundreds of thousands more people into poverty every year – that’s why it is so important that national and local government take the necessary steps to help people quit. With the right support, many thousands of people could escape tobacco addiction and poverty at the same time.”

Recommendations

Action by central government to lift smokers out of poverty should include:
• Imposing a ‘polluter pays’ charge on the tobacco manufacturers to fund tobacco control including anti-smoking campaigns, enforcement and targeted support for smokers to quit.
• Stricter regulation of tobacco marketing including, for example, requiring retailers to have a licence, raising the age of sale and requiring pack inserts which promote quitting.

Local authorities also have a key role to play. They should set their own local smoking prevalence targets and strategies to achieve them in line with the recommendations set out in the ‘The End of Smoking’ report developed by ASH and Fresh in collaboration with local authorities, the NHS and civil society including [7]:
• Supporting smokefree environments
• Promoting an annual quit attempt
• Providing diverse stop smoking support

ENDS

Notes to the editor:

About Action on Smoking and Health (ASH)
Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) is a health charity working to eliminate the harm caused by tobacco use. ASH receives funding for its programme of work from Cancer Research UK and the British Heart Foundation.

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References