Warn about the dangers of tobacco

The *WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control* states:

Article 11

Each Party shall … ensure that tobacco product packaging and labelling do not promote a tobacco product by any means that are false, misleading [or] deceptive …

Each Party shall … ensure that… tobacco products … carry health warnings describing the harmful effects of tobacco use …

Article 12

Each Party shall promote and strengthen public awareness of tobacco control issues, using all available communication tools …

Few smokers and non-smokers fully understand the health risks of tobacco

Warning labels on tobacco packaging and hard-hitting mass media campaigns provide crucial information about the dangers of tobacco use.

Despite conclusive evidence on the dangers of tobacco, few tobacco users worldwide understand the full extent of the health risks.

Many smokers believe that they can reduce or stop tobacco use before health problems occur.

Both smokers and non-smokers underestimate the addictiveness of tobacco and the risk it poses to health. Both smokers and non-smokers also underestimate the danger of exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke. These threats have not been adequately explained to the public.

The need for public education is even more pronounced in low- and middle-income countries, where tobacco use is on the rise and tobacco control is generally in its early stages.

Effective warning labels, anti-tobacco advertising and the proactive use of media to influence the public and policy-makers are three key ways to communicate the health risks of tobacco .

Warning labels increase awareness of health risks

Prominent warning labels on tobacco packs are the most direct way of communicating health risks to tobacco users.

Effective health warnings on cigarette packs encourage smokers to quit and discourage non-smokers from starting.

Best practice warning labels, that comply with the Guidelines for implementing Article 11 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC), reach all tobacco users, increase their awareness of health risks, are well-accepted by the public and cost governments virtually nothing.

Warnings change the image of tobacco

Comprehensive warnings about the dangers of tobacco are critical to changing its image, especially among adolescents and young adults.
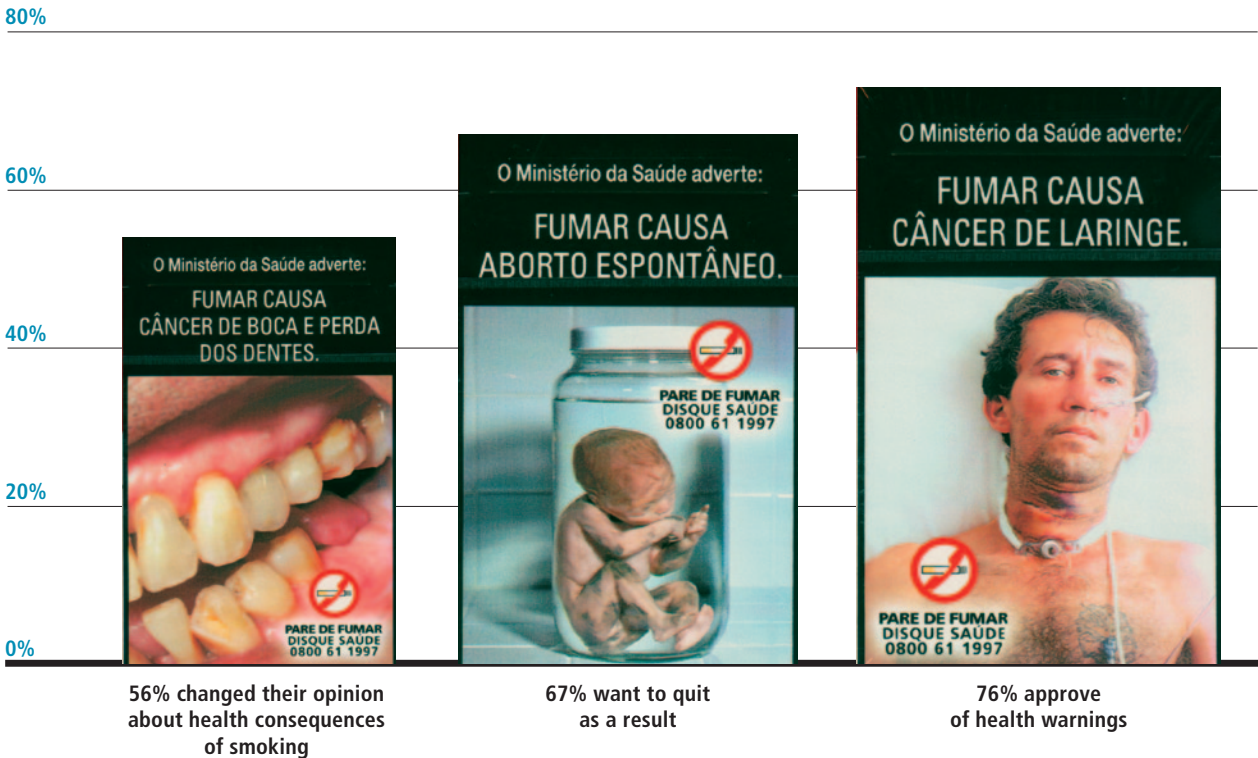
People need to associate tobacco use with its actual human impact, extreme addictiveness and dangerous health consequences, and to see it as socially undesirable and negative.

Health warnings and anti-tobacco advertising encourage tobacco users to quit and help keep young people from starting.

Warnings and anti-tobacco advertising also help gain public acceptance of other tobacco control measures such as establishing smoke-free environments.

SMOKERS APPROVE OF PICTORIAL WARNINGS

Impact of pictorial warnings on Brazilian smokers

56% changed their opinion about health consequences of smoking

67% want to quit as a result

76% approve of health warnings

Source: Datafolha Instituto de Pesquisas. Opinião pública, 2002.

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Monitor	Monitor tobacco use and prevention policies
Protect	Protect people from tobacco smoke
Offer	Offer help to quit tobacco use
Warn	**Warn about the dangers of tobacco**
Enforce	Enforce bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship
Raise	Raise taxes on tobacco

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) is the pre-eminent global tobacco control instrument, which contains legally binding obligations for its Parties and provides a comprehensive direction for tobacco control policy at all levels. WHO introduced the MPOWER package of measures to assist in the country-level implementation of effective measures to reduce the demand for tobacco, contained in the WHO FCTC.

Additional resources on this topic are available at **www.who.int/tobacco/mpower/publications**

Characteristics of effective warning labels

Best practice health warning labels should:

- Describe the harmful effect of tobacco use
- Be large, clear, visible, and legible, covering 50% or more of principal pack display areas (both front and back) and in no case less than 30%
- Rotate periodically so that they continue to attract the attention of the public
- Appear in the country's principal language(s)
- Include graphic pictures
- Be approved by the competent national authority

One of ten graphic pack warnings required in Brazil.
© Ministry of Health Brazil/2008
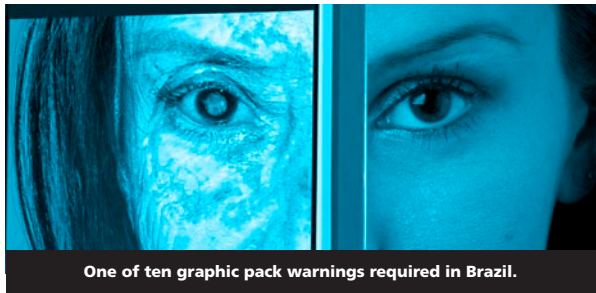
Misleading descriptors

Studies show that more than half of smokers incorrectly believe that the terms "light" and "ultra-light" refer to cigarettes that are less harmful to their health. Misleading descriptors – such as 'low tar', 'light', and 'mild' – and any packaging that creates a false impression of the product being less harmful should be banned.

Tobacco packaging that creates a false impression of the product being less harmful than other forms of tobacco should be banned.

Tobacco packaging should contain information on relevant constituents and emissions of tobacco products. However, statements about tobacco constituents and emissions must not imply that a product is less harmful than other tobacco products.

Maximizing the impact of warning labels

There are several ways to maximize the effectiveness of warning labels:

- Use pictures with graphic, culturally appropriate depictions of disease and other negative images in full color. Pictures have more impact on most smokers than words alone. They are also critical in reaching the large number of people worldwide who cannot read.
- Elicit unfavorable emotional associations with tobacco use by addressing harmful health effects, addiction potential and adverse social and economic consequences.
- Use strong and clear language that describes specific diseases caused by tobacco use and exposure to second-hand smoke.
- Other required packaging, labelling or markings should not obstruct warning labels.
- Measures mandating plain and generic packaging that prohibits the use of logos, brand images, or promotional information should be considered.

In Singapore, where highly graphic warnings are used, 71% of smokers said they knew more about the health effects of smoking because of warning labels.

'Cigarettes cause lung cancer': one of nine pack warnings, Thailand.
© ASH Thailand/2006

Anti-tobacco advertising increases awareness of health risks

Anti-tobacco advertising in all forms of media can help publicize the full extent of tobacco's dangers.

When exposed to graphic anti-tobacco messages on television, smokers are more likely to quit.

Campaigns using graphic images that demonstrate the physical harm caused by tobacco use are especially effective in convincing users to quit.

Anti-tobacco advertising about the health harms of secondhand smoke, Sao Paulo, Brazil.
© World Lung Foundation/2010

High-quality advertising is feasible

Sustained, highly visible and effective counter-advertising campaigns can be expensive. However, advertising can be easily and inexpensively adapted from content that has been used successfully in other countries.

Obtaining free or low-cost television and radio time can also reduce costs. In Turkey, all television and radio channels are required to devote 90 minutes of free airtime each month to tobacco control and addiction, including 30 minutes of prime time. Remaining costs can be covered through tobacco tax or other government revenues.

Professional companies, including advertising agencies, should be used to develop creative materials, especially for television. Anti-tobacco advertising should have the same production quality and persuasive power as tobacco industry propaganda.

Advertising should be systematically tested with focus groups before being run to ensure that anti-tobacco messaging has the intended effect.

"Earned media" is effective and inexpensive

Public relations activities can further educate people about the harms of tobacco and counter tobacco industry misinformation. As such, anti-tobacco educational campaigns should include efforts to obtain news coverage by working with journalists to develop stories or writing letters to the editor.

This is sometimes referred to as "earned media" because, unlike advertising, no space or air time is purchased, so costs are relatively low.

Public relations efforts should be proactive and engage the media whenever there are developments in tobacco control.

The media will usually cover the following events as news:

- Introduction or passage of new laws in agreement with the WHO FCTC
- Implementation of MPOWER measures such as smoke-free places, anti-tobacco advertising and pack warnings
- Launch of an anti-tobacco advertising campaign
- Release of new research findings

Advocates need to make sure factual tobacco control messages are included in any related press.

The media can also be encouraged, to reveal industry marketing and lobbying tactics, cover the health and economic harms of tobacco, highlight the progress of tobacco control in local communities or feature anti-tobacco outreach activities conducted by youths.

Local stories with strong human interest angles and backed with facts are likely to gain the greatest attention from media and their audiences.

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A TV advertisement in China warns about the dangers of smoking and discourages giving cigarettes as gifts.
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