

World No Tobacco Day 2016: Get ready for plain packaging

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This year on World No Tobacco Day, being held on 31 May, WHO is calling on governments to get ready for plain packaging of tobacco products.

Strip back the glamour and glossy packaging that contain tobacco products, and what is left? A product that kills almost 6 million people every year.

Tobacco packaging is a form of advertising and promotion that often misleads consumers and serves to hide the deadly reality of tobacco use.

Now, the World Health Organization (WHO) is drawing attention to the role of plain packaging of tobacco products as part of a comprehensive approach to tobacco control, including comprehensive bans on advertising, promotion and sponsorship and graphic health warnings. We do this for a very good reason: plain packaging works.

New evidence from Australia, the first country to fully implement plain packaging, shows that changes to tobacco packaging there led to over 100,000 fewer smokers in Australia in the first 34 months since implementation in 2012.

The evidence tells us that plain packaging

reduces the attractiveness of tobacco products. It restricts tobacco advertising and promotion. It limits misleading packaging and labelling. And it increases the effectiveness of health warnings.

The evidence explains why plain packaging was included in guidelines to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC).

It also explains why governments, like those in Australia, France, Ireland, and the United Kingdom, have passed plain packaging laws.

The strength of this evidence has been rigorously tested, including recently in the High Court of England and Wales, which rejected all 17 of the industry's challenges to the UK plain packaging law. In doing so, the court stated that some of the tobacco industry evidence was "wholly untenable and resembled diatribe rather than expert opinion". This decision came in the same week that arbitrators revealed that they refused to hear a Philip Morris claim against the Australian law on grounds that the company had engaged in an abuse of process in bringing the claim.

These results are a cause for celebration, but

governments must remain vigilant. We have seen over and over again how industry, fuelled by its deep pockets, has been able to develop new strategies in an attempt to protect profits generated from its deadly products. In the case of plain packaging, it has been the target of a massive tobacco industry misinformation campaign dating as far back as 1993.

WHO has stood up against this campaign, replacing falsehoods with the facts.

While plain packaging represents a power tool for tobacco control, it also builds upon other measures that governments have at their disposal to curb tobacco use. It is recommended that plain packaging be used as part of a comprehensive multisectoral approach to tobacco control.

On this World No Tobacco Day, we are telling the world to get ready for even more comprehensive tobacco control.

Get ready to further accelerate implementation of the WHO FCTC.

Get ready to improve global health, reduce premature deaths from noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) like cancers, heart and lung disease, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

And get ready for plain packaging.

