

Plain Packaging: Does it work?

Background

Australia introduced plain packaging in December 2012; in April 2015, researchers published several evaluations that explained the effects plain packaging was having.¹

Effects on Adult Smokers

Telephone interviews were conducted before and after plain packaging was introduced to test whether the policy had achieved its overall objectives. They found people who smoked:

- considered their pack less appealing
- thought the quality of their cigarettes had declined
- reported lower satisfaction
- were less likely to see some brands as more prestigious than others
- were more likely to notice warning labels post plain packaging.²

A cohort study of adult smokers examined quitting behaviours prior to, during and post plain packaging implementation and found:

- greater quit intentions
- higher quit attempt rates post-plain packaging.³

Effects on Adolescents

Studies of adolescents conducted prior to and post plain packaging's introduction found young people, particularly those who smoked:

- were less likely to discriminate between brands on the basis of packaging
- viewed packages less positively post-plain packaging.

The authors concluded that plain packaging has reduced the appeal of cigarette packs.⁴

Data from the same study also found that acknowledgement of smoking's negative health effects had remained high and increased where new risk information was presented.⁵

Illicit tobacco

Telephone surveys of current cigarette smokers conducted continuously from April 2012 to March 2014 found **no evidence** of increased use of two categories of manufactured tobacco likely to be contraband (cheap whites and brands purchased >20 percent below retail price). Nor did the researchers find evidence that unbranded illicit tobacco (chop chop) use had increased.⁶

Australia's experience suggests plain packaging is reducing the appeal of tobacco and increasing knowledge of smoking's harms, while peer-reviewed studies to date have not reported an increase in illicit tobacco use. These findings suggest New Zealand will experience similar benefits and should move rapidly to implement plain packaging.

References

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