

# Committee of Presidents of Medical Colleges

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## Position Statement on Plain Packaging of Cigarettes

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Cigarette smoking is universally recognised as a major preventable cause of morbidity and mortality in Australia. This has previously been commented on by Australia's Specialist Medical Colleges.

Various strategies have been proposed and enacted to limit cigarette consumption. A recent strategy to introduce plain packaging of cigarettes has only been operative for a relatively short period of time. The efficacy of this strategy has recently been questioned in the media.

The Committee of Presidents of Medical Colleges supports evidence based medicine. The evidence that current smoking is associated with a greater risk of death from lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, ischaemic heart disease and stroke, worse postoperative outcomes, including a 60% greater mortality, an increased incidence of cardiovascular events, pneumonia/chest complications, and more complications from hip arthroplasty and poorer wound healing is outlined in the references below. Smokers lose at least one decade of life expectancy, as compared with those who have never smoked. Cessation before the age of 40 years reduces the risk of death associated with continued smoking by about 90%. References are listed below.

Any interventional strategies should be assessed and critiqued. The efficacy of this approach to plain packaging of cigarettes should undergo the same assessments that apply to other medical or public health initiatives. The assessment should be along the lines of scientific principles and should be rigorous, and peer reviewed, with decisions about the continuation of the initiative not based on simply the desire to do the right thing, but rather an analysis of the scientific data.

CPMC believes that discussion should be a transparent and ongoing process where political opinion should not influence comment on the matter.

The optimum outcome from the process should be to describe the validity and cost-effectiveness of the intervention in order to guide future policy. While the plain packaging of cigarettes can be viewed as a small step forward in this area of important preventative medicine it is welcomed by the specialist medical colleges who comprise the membership of CPMC.

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