

Media Statement

HEALTH GROUPS SUPPORT INTRODUCTION OF LARGE, PICTURE WARNINGS ON TOBACCO PACKS

For immediate release, 10 May 2006

The Smokefree Coalition and Public Health Association are welcoming a proposal to place large graphic images on cigarette packets.

Smokefree Coalition Director Mark Peck says the consultation document released today by Associate Minister of Health Damien O'Connor shows that the views of health groups have been taken into account. The document proposes a series of warnings about the dangers of smoking, including large picture images on the front and back of cigarette packets.

"We know from research that picture warnings are more effective than text warnings – and the bigger the better. While both proposed warning size options are an improvement on the current situation, we urge the Government to go even further and introduce picture warnings that cover 60 percent of the front and 90 percent of the back of the pack."

Public Health Association Director Dr Gay Keating says large, graphic warnings will highlight the fact that tobacco is a hazardous substance that causes the death of over 4500 New Zealanders each year.

"This is a unique response to a unique problem. For the first time we will be realistically illustrating the harm caused by tobacco – such as throat cancer, rotting gums and teeth, gangrene, impotence and blindness.

"Picture warnings also have the advantage of being easily understood by people with lower literacy or for whom English is not their first language."

Both organisations welcomed the proposal to clarify the current wording on tobacco packs that refers people to the national telephone Quitline.

Mark Peck says the proposed new wording will make it clear that people can call the Quitline on 0800 778 778 for quit smoking support.

“Some of the proposed picture warnings are pretty graphic, so it is vital that smokers are given a positive action to take after reading them. The Quitline is a free, highly-effective smoking cessation service, that also offers low-cost nicotine patches and gum. It makes absolute sense to promote the Quitline on cigarette packets.”

For further information:

Mark Peck, Director Smokefree Coalition, 04 472 0157, 0274 461 650
Dr Gay Keating, Director Public Health Association, 04 472 3060, cell 021 138 2006