

Smokefree Coalition backs call for tobacco industry inquiry

Smokefree Coalition media release

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The Smokefree Coalition fully endorses the Māori Affairs Select Committee's call for the New Zealand tobacco industry to give an account of the role it plays in causing both sickness and early deaths among Māori.

Māori are more than twice as likely than non-Māori to smoke, and twice as likely to die as a result of smoking. Nearly a third of Māori deaths are attributable to tobacco and tobacco use is an important cause of health inequalities in New Zealand

Coalition Chair Robert Beaglehole said the Select Committee's call for an inquiry into the tobacco industry is long overdue.

"For decades this industry has been marketing a product which damages its users and their families. It has no qualms about profiting while many of its customers die.

"The Smokefree Coalition commends the Māori Affairs Select Committee for taking a stand against an industry which deliberately targets its people, the young, the poor and the disadvantaged.

"The tobacco industry markets the cigarette as a symbol of freedom and personal choice, knowing that addiction robs people of the freedom to choose.

"Our society has been willing to tolerate this unethical marketing practice for too long and it is time that industry practices are exposed in a public forum."

Professor Beaglehole highlighted examples of the industry's deceptive practices including:

- adding chemicals to make tobacco more addictive while for years denying cigarettes were addictive at all;
- encouraging smoking by role models in movies watched by young people;
- adding sweeteners to make cigarettes more appealing to youth;
- covering up evidence about the dangers of second-hand smoke
- marketing light and mild cigarettes as a healthier alternatives knowing they are equally dangerous.

Robert Beaglehole, an Emeritus Professor at the University of Auckland and Director of the Department of Chronic Disease and Health Promotion at the World Health Organization until 2007, said tobacco use is declining only very slowly in New Zealand.

"The Smokefree Coalition is calling for immediate action to raise the tax on cigarettes, and especially roll your own tobacco, and a ban on point of sales displays of cigarettes. Both measures are supported by local and international evidence and will help prevent children from starting smoking."

-Ends-

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