

## **Tobacco tax increase urged in the Year of the Lungs**

**Smokefree Coalition media release: 12 January 2010**

The Forum of International Respiratory Societies has declared 2010 the Year of the Lungs to address the neglect lung health traditionally receives in public discussion.

Smokefree Coalition Director Prudence Stone says this makes 2010 a fitting year for the Government to introduce significant tobacco tax increases which would raise the cost of smoking and lower smoking rates.

“There’s no doubt that smoking is the primary risk factor for lung disease. Tobacco use kills five million people around the world each year, 5000 in New Zealand alone. Putting an international spotlight on the lungs is really just another way of highlighting the need to reduce the number of people dying from their tobacco addictions,” she said.

Members of the Smokefree Coalition want to see Government introduce a timeline of legislative measures that will regulate tobacco supply and reduce demand for smoking, resulting in a smokefree New Zealand by 2020. Central to the strategy are tax increases that will steadily price cigarettes out of more and more wallets.

“Higher prices are among the most effective tobacco control measures because they make it much harder for young people to start smoking, and youth are the tobacco industry’s primary targets for recruitment into lifelong addiction,” Ms Stone said.

“They are also effective for lower socioeconomic smokers, who will reduce their smoking as it becomes less affordable, and many will seek help to quit.”

Ms Stone says another great gesture during the Year of the Lungs would be to target revenue from tobacco tax directly towards lung disease treatment, as well as towards services that help people quit. Recent studies have shown even most smokers support tax increases if the extra money raised is spent on tobacco-related health objectives and smoking cessation programmes.

She says The Year of the Lungs is already getting off to an excellent start in New Zealand.

“Submissions to the Māori Affairs Select Committee’s inquiry into the tobacco industry and the consequences of tobacco use for Māori close on 29 January and we are looking forward to seeing some of the industry’s underhand marketing tactics exposed.

“We think this could sound the death knell for big tobacco in New Zealand. People are now much less willing to tolerate its peddling of death and addiction for profit. How fitting that the year of the Lungs will mark the beginning of its sunset years.”

Ms Stone says the Coalition is not advocating for a ban on tobacco.

“This is not about prohibition or making smoking illegal. It is about reducing demand for tobacco over time until it ceases to exist. It’s about protecting future generations from exposure to tobacco products and the smoking lifestyle and reducing the number of New Zealanders dying from preventable lung diseases.

“Tax increases will mean more smokers quitting and fewer young people taking it up during the Year of the Lungs.”

However, Ms Stone warned that roll-your-own tobacco must be taxed at an even higher rate to prevent smokers switching to “rollies” because they are cheaper.

For more information contact:

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