

## New Zealand's tobacco control leadership slipping away

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New Zealand is losing its place as a world leader in tobacco control, the Smokefree Coalition has warned.

Coalition Director Prudence Stone said many countries around the world are implementing decisive smokefree legislation while New Zealand dithers.

“There was a time not long ago when other countries looked to us for leadership in tobacco control. Our smokefree workplaces, bars and restaurants legislation was among the first and most comprehensive in the world. It was seen as a bold move at the time, but the vast majority of New Zealanders now welcome it as the norm and smoky workplaces are unthinkable.

“We’ve been talking about removing tobacco displays, banning smoking in cars with children and raising cigarette taxes for ages. Meanwhile, other countries are getting on with it and putting these laws in place to protect the health of their people.”

Retail displays have been banned in countries like Canada, Ireland, Scotland and Finland, and many countries have made it illegal to smoke in cars carrying children including Finland, Canada, Puerto Rico and several Australian states.

Significant tobacco tax increases designed to reduce smoking rates are planned this year in Greece, Bulgaria, Japan, France, the European Union and the US State of Washington.

The Coalition’s warning comes on the eve of the Māori Affairs Select Committee’s inquiry into the tobacco industry and the consequences of tobacco use for Māori, which is accepting submissions from the public until 29 January.

Ms Stone says the inquiry is an excellent way for New Zealand to re-assert itself as a global leader in tobacco control.

“What an unprecedented opportunity to call big tobacco to account for the 5000 New Zealand lives it destroys every year, 600 of which are Māori. We can be sure the world will be watching this inquiry with interest.”

The Coalition wants the government to accept its vision for a smokefree New Zealand by 2020 by adopting its time-lined tobacco control strategy, which includes regular increases in tobacco tax.

“Evidence from the past shows a 10 percent tax increase could reduce smoking rates by up to five percent. A series of annual hikes could have our smoking rate down from 20 percent to single figures in just a few years, and make smoking really unaffordable for kids.

“This is the way progressive governments are going and it would be sad if New Zealand began to lag behind countries like Canada, or like Finland which has recently introduced various smokefree laws in an effort to ‘get rid of tobacco once and for all.’

“We can waste time debating the same sorts of red herrings that were put up as objections to the Smoke-free Environments Amendment Act 2003, all of which proved to be non-issues, or we can make 2010 the year we get to work.

“With a little courage, we, too, could get rid of tobacco once and for all by 2020.”

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Wikipedia’s list of world smoking bans: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_smoking\\_bans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_smoking_bans)