

## **Smokefree Coalition closes its doors with celebration and sadness**

Smokefree Coalition media release 29 July 2016

The organisation that provided a platform for unity and collaboration in New Zealand tobacco control is no more.

At a Wellington celebration tinged with sadness members of the Smokefree Coalition gathered tonight to commemorate 20 years of achievement in reducing smoking in New Zealand while lamenting the loss of government funding that has forced it to close down operations.

“The Smokefree Coalition helped provide a united voice for the various tobacco control organisations in New Zealand,” said Chair Dr Jan Pearson.

“And it was that unity that made us able to achieve plain packaging; the ban on retail tobacco displays; reduced duty free allowances, smokefree bars, restaurants, workplaces and prisons; and annual tax increases.

“These are all measures that have saved countless lives and helped avoid untold suffering by creating a national environment where smoking is no longer cool or even normal – and making it much harder for tobacco companies to convince New Zealanders and their children that it is.”

The Smokefree Coalition is also willing to take much of the credit for the Government’s commitment to becoming a smokefree nation by 2025.

“It was our original *Vision 2020* document, produced with the help of our members, that got the ball rolling for that commitment and it was our *Smokefree Roadmap 2025* that laid out the pathway to achieve it,” Dr Pearson said.

The Government announced last year it would cease all existing contracts in tobacco control and the Smokefree Coalition contract was not renewed under the new funding strategy. Dr Pearson does not believe this was the right decision but says it is time to pass the mantle to the organisations that remain and wish them well.

“There is still much to be done in New Zealand tobacco control including better support for people to quit, more services for Māori and Pasifika and better policing of retailers – too many of whom are still willing to sell to minors who subsequently become addicted.”

Dr Pearson said the sector relied heavily on the energetic leadership of Dr Prudence Stone and said she would be sadly missed.

“Dr Stone will start her new role as Children's Rights Advocate for UNICEF on Monday 1 August, and we hope there is room in the new position for her to remain a champion for the prevention of smoking uptake among children.

"She has been tireless in smokefree cars advocacy, which is absolutely a children's rights issue. The public support it overwhelmingly so its only barrier is lack of political will and leadership. I am sure she will continue to remind our politicians about this and the many other rights to good health children have.”

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