

MEDIA RELEASE



Specialist Medical Colleges endorse key anti-smoking measure

Thursday 5 August, 2010

Physicians and surgeons have strongly endorsed legislation which mandates the plain packaging of tobacco products in Australia from 1 July 2012 and have called on all Australian political parties to commit to this key health initiative.

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians and the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons have condemned advertisements in today's press which are critical of this key anti-smoking measure.

"The Alliance of Australian Retailers advertisements, supported by the big tobacco companies, are to be condemned in the strongest possible terms," RACP President Professor John Kolbe said. "This is a cynical ploy by big tobacco, which should have no place in the Australian political process."

"Packaging is the only means big tobacco has left to market cigarettes to young people and to overcome the impact of health warnings. If, as today's advertisements allege, plain packaging will have no effect on smoking rates, why do tobacco companies spend millions of dollars on packet design?"

"The retailers would have us believe that jobs and the economy would somehow suffer as a result of plain packaging of cigarettes. In fact in 2004/05 smoking cost the Australian economy over \$31 billion¹," Professor Kolbe said.

The RACS President, Mr Ian Civil, said any initiatives that reduce the incidence of smoking, with its profoundly harmful effects on public health, are to be applauded.

"Given that smoking kills 15,000 Australians each year, Australian doctors will be particularly pleased with this important initiative," Mr Civil said.

"I note estimates made by Professor Rob Moodie of the National Preventative Health Taskforce that plain packaging might result in 100,000 fewer adults smoking and 25,000 fewer children taking up this appallingly harmful habit.

"The retailers' observation that the United Kingdom and Canada rejected plain packaging is an irrelevance. Australia pioneered road safety measures that are now commonplace around the developed world; we should now lead the world on this issue, one of the most important public health challenges of our age.

¹ Collins and Lapsley 2008

“Australian retailers complain that plain packaging is somehow a regulatory burden. Australia’s physicians and surgeons live daily with the burden of having to tell patients that they are dying from a smoking related disease.

“There’s no comparison.”

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