
Rudd mandate for tobacco excise increase, food labelling reform

Taskforce report a blueprint for cancer prevention

The Rudd Government has a mandate to increase tobacco tax following the release of its Preventative Health Taskforce's final recommendations, Cancer Council Australia said today.

"Since Mr Rudd as opposition leader began campaigning on a major shift in health policy towards disease prevention more than two years ago, Cancer Council Australia has strongly supported his vision," Chief Executive Officer, Professor Olver, said.

"Now that the Preventative Health Taskforce's final recommendations have been released, it is time to translate the vision into policy – so we can begin to enjoy the long-anticipated population health benefits."

Professor Olver said that while a number of the taskforce's recommendations would need to be phased in over time, some, such as raising tobacco excise, should be introduced quickly so their potential to prevent cancer takes effect as soon as possible.

"Despite advances in tobacco control policy over the past 30 years, smoking still causes more cancer deaths in Australia than any other preventable risk factor," Professor Olver said.

"As the taskforce says, increasing cigarette prices to at least \$20 per packet is the best policy lever immediately available to government to reduce smoking rates, particularly among people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who bear the brunt of smoking death in Australia."

Professor Olver said simplifying food labelling was another recommendation that could be fast-tracked.

"Healthy food choices have a clear role to play in reducing obesity-related cancer, yet it is clear that the current daily intake guide is difficult for consumers to understand," he said.

"Government could begin phasing in a comprehensive approach to obesity control – integrating research, social marketing, active communities and food marketing reform – by mandating a national system of food labelling that clearly informs healthy consumer choice."

Professor Olver commended the Government for commissioning the taskforce and the level of rigour involved in its work.

"The recommendations are an urgently required blueprint for preventing cancers attributed to smoking, obesity and alcohol, as cancer incidence in Australia is likely to increase by around 30 per cent every decade until the middle of the century," he said. "These measures should hopefully also contribute to 'closing the gap' on life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people."

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