



Unmasking Big Tobacco: An Open Letter to Australians

Dear Australians,

As World No Tobacco Day approaches, we write as a coalition of health organisations to highlight one of Australia's greatest public health successes—and the growing threat to its future.

Australia has achieved some of the lowest smoking rates in the world thanks to strong, evidence based, tobacco control policies that have saved thousands of lives. But this progress is now at risk.

In 2026, the tobacco industry is working to regain influence over public health policy. At a recent federal parliamentary inquiry into illicit tobacco, a major global tobacco company was granted a private, undisclosed hearing during these important public proceedings. No public listing. No transparency. No scrutiny.

This is deeply concerning. Giving a tobacco giant this platform undermines Australia's obligations under the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which is designed to protect policymaking from tobacco industry interference. These safeguards exist for a reason—tobacco company profits depend on products that still kill 66 Australians every day.

The industry is now using the rise of illicit tobacco to reshape public debate and to push for lower taxes. But illicit tobacco is primarily an enforcement and health issue—not a tax one. Even if we were to cut the tobacco tax altogether, illicit products would remain cheaper, while legal tobacco would become more affordable, tobacco industry profits would skyrocket and smoking rates would increase, undoing decades of progress.

We must remember that smoking remains Australia's leading cause of preventable death, responsible for 24,000 deaths each year, with nearly one in five cancer deaths still attributed to tobacco use. Australia's success in tobacco control is real, but it is also fragile. It relies on continued vigilance and a firm commitment to evidence based policy, free from industry influence. To stay on track, we must:

- Enforce strict transparency and uphold protections against tobacco industry interference;
- Maintain proven policies, including tobacco taxation, advertising restrictions, and public education campaigns;
- Strengthen action on illicit tobacco through enforcement and by assisting people to quit smoking altogether, not by lowering prices, increasing affordability and increasing tobacco industry profits;
- Expose industry tactics and hold decision makers accountable.

As World No Tobacco Day on 31 May calls on us to *Unmask the Appeal*, we urge Australians and policymakers to *Unmask Big Tobacco* and question who really benefits from tobacco tax cuts and other efforts to weaken tobacco control measures. If you share our concerns, send this letter to your local MP.



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For support to quit smoking or vaping, visit quit.org.au or call Quitline on 13 7848.