

Media Release

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Australian initiative goes global and wins against ‘heartless Goliath’.

Global insurer divests €1.8 billion from tobacco industry

International efforts to reduce the 6 million preventable deaths caused by smoking each year took a major step forward today, with global insurance company AXA, divesting €1.8 billion from tobacco interests.

Cancer Council Australia CEO Professor Sanchia Aranda applauded the company and the Union for International Cancer Control’s (UICC’s) supported Tobacco Free Portfolios initiative, which has taken the advocacy work of Melbourne-based oncologist Dr Bronwyn King to the world.

“Global Big Tobacco turns over around \$35 billion in profits annually,” Professor Aranda said. “So it’s a lucrative business – if you’re comfortable investing in 6 million preventable deaths a year and rising.

“AXA is joining an increasing number of firms that are taking a socially responsible position on tobacco. Companies that continue to invest in tobacco will end up on the wrong side of history.”

The partnership between UICC and Tobacco Free Portfolios is working with finance companies worldwide to expose the real outcomes of investing in tobacco companies – death, disease and unaffordable healthcare costs. The partnership is building on the work of oncologist Dr Bronwyn King, whose efforts in Australia have led to 36 funds divesting \$A2 billion from tobacco.

Professor Aranda praised Dr King, a Cancer Council Australia ambassador who started the tobacco divestment movement several years ago. “Dr King has treated hundreds of patients who could not be saved because of the severe nature of their cancers caused by smoking,” Professor Aranda said. “It’s a tragedy that cancer clinicians see all too often.

“The global take-up of Dr King’s mission through the NGO Tobacco Free Portfolios shows what one extraordinary person can achieve against extraordinary odds.

“Investors need to better understand what a heartless Goliath the global tobacco industry is – and that investing in their profiteering is an investment in death, disease and a massive overall economic burden on communities.”

Professor Aranda said the tobacco industry had a long history of using its deep pockets to exploit any opportunity to addict young people to nicotine.

“Money is the industry’s lifeblood. Cut off the investment by educating investors on how their money is spent and returned, and we can protect millions of young people now from a premature death as adults.

“We have strong laws in Australia, which is why we have record low numbers of school-age smokers. But in countries in the developing world where there are no such protections, tobacco companies engage in shameful activities to hook young people on smoking.”

Industry tactics included free product giveaways and sponsorships of events for young people, attempts to subvert laws and health policies, and misleading advertising.

Professor Aranda also congratulated HRH Princess Dina Mired of Jordan, who chairs the UICC's Global Task Force for Tobacco Free Portfolios.

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