

18 May 2026

Health bodies unite to expose big tobacco's push for tax cuts that would reverse 25 years of progress

Open letter released on second day of illicit tobacco inquiry hearings

Cancer Council Australia and a coalition of health organisations have come together to *Unmask Big Tobacco* ahead of World No Tobacco Day and as the second day of federal illicit tobacco inquiry hearings recommence today, Monday 18th May 2026.

They warn that Big Tobacco is exploiting concerns about the illicit market as an excuse to undo 25 years of successful tobacco control policies, which became apparent on the first day of the illicit tobacco inquiry earlier this month when a tobacco giant was granted a secret hearing.

The *Unmasking Big Tobacco: An Open Letter to Australians*, signed by 15 health organisations as well as individual health experts and academics, outlines how far Australia has come and how we can stay on track by:

- Enforcing 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, not by lowering taxes, increasing affordability and increasing Big Tobacco's profits to expose industry tactics and hold decision makers accountable.

Signatories include Cancer Council, Australian Council on Smoking & Health, Asthma Australia, Heart Foundation, Life ED NSW & ACT, Lung Foundation Australia, McCabe Centre for Law & Cancer, Public Health Association of Australia, Clinical Oncology Society of Australia, Quit, Tobacco Endgame, The Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand, The Australian Prevention Partnership Centre, Stroke Foundation, and the Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance.

The open letter comes after a major global tobacco company was granted a private and undisclosed hearing during the illicit tobacco senate inquiry, undermining Australia's obligations under the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which is designed to protect policymaking from tobacco industry interference.

Highlighting the ways in which the tobacco industry employs illicit tobacco as a dog whistle, the open letter outlines how these companies seek to reshape public debate to weaken policy – specifically with the aim of securing a reduction to the tobacco excise. Cutting tobacco taxes would deliver billions in profits to multinational tobacco companies, while making cigarettes more affordable and increasing smoking rates, the only real winners would be the tobacco industry itself.

Australia has achieved some of the lowest smoking rates in the world through strong, evidence-based, tobacco control policies that reduce affordability, appeal, supply, access and promotion of tobacco products. It's essential that this progress is protected from the tobacco industry's interests.

Cancer Council CEO Jacinta Reddan joined a chorus of public health bodies calling for the tobacco industry to be prevented from interfering in public health policy.

“We will not allow the tobacco industry to reverse 25 years of hard-won evidence-based achievements in policy reform that is responsible for halving smoking rates in Australia.

“We are pleased to be joined by public health colleagues in signing this letter to urge the public and policy makers to stay on track, for continued vigilance and firm commitment to evidence based policy, free from industry influence. We cannot allow tobacco companies, whose profits come from products that still kill 66 Australians every day, to weaken tobacco control measures,” says Reddan.

“The evidence is clear. Illicit tobacco is an enforcement, licensing, and regulatory issue. Calls for cuts to the tobacco excise are not about helping communities, they are part of a coordinated effort by the tobacco industry to protect profits at the expense of public health. Even if the tobacco excise was cut altogether, illicit products would remain cheaper, while legal tobacco would become more affordable, tobacco industry profits would skyrocket and smoking rates would increase.”

The Australian public should not be at risk of their public health policies being eroded. Smoking remains Australia's leading cause of preventable death, responsible for 24,000 deaths per year, with nearly one in five cancer deaths still attributed to tobacco use.

World No Tobacco Day 2026 asks the world to Unmask the Appeal. Cancer Council Australia along with our signatories, are Unmasking Big Tobacco and their plans to increase profits by calling for tobacco tax cuts at the cost of countless lives.

If members of the public share our concerns, we implore the Australian public to share this open letter with their local MPs.

-ENDS-

Access the open letter [*Unmasking Big Tobacco: An Open Letter*](#).

Contact details

For all media enquiries and interview opportunities, please contact:

Cancer Council Australia, media@cancer.org.au

02 8256 4109 (redirects to mobile outside of business hours)

About Cancer Council Australia

Cancer Council Australia is Australia's leading cancer charity, working to reduce the impact of cancer for all Australians. Cancer Council Australia works with its members, the eight state and territory Cancer Councils to:

- Undertake and fund cancer research
- Prevent and control cancer
- Provide information and support for people affected by cancer
- Shape and influence policy and practice

Find out more at cancer.org.au, or visit our [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), or [LinkedIn](#).