

It's time to quit!

Contributed by Administrator
Tuesday, 31 May 2011
Last Updated Tuesday, 07 June 2011

Health workers throughout the region are raising their voices in warning about the dangers of tobacco smoking. Pacific Island countries and territories have marked World No Tobacco Day with special events and publicity including community information events, banners, posters, advertising and media coverage. In New Caledonia, the WNTD poster (pictured) says 'Want to quit? Maybe now is the right time.'

In 2011 health workers around the region also honour the global health treaty – the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). The treaty has been ratified by 171 countries, meaning that about 87 per cent of the world's population are affected by increased tobacco control measures in their countries.

The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and other international agencies promote and support Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs) in their work to implement FCTC. For those who are not signatories to FCTC, SPC provides support with the development and implementation of comprehensive tobacco control strategies.

SPC's Non-communicable Disease Adviser on Tobacco, Jeanie McKenzie, said there had been some notable successes in the Pacific region.

'Many countries have made substantial inroads in developing strong tobacco control legislation, including the enforcement of smoke-free public places and substantial tax increases on tobacco products.'

'Country after country has banned tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship and strengthened health warnings on cigarette packs,' she said.

Australia is currently seeking support for its plan to introduce plain packaging, which would mean that cigarettes are sold in a dark olive brown packet with graphic health warnings on the front and back and the name of the brand of cigarettes written in a plain font, without any marketing or other branding.

The intention is to reduce the appeal of the tobacco products, particularly to young people, and to increase the visibility of the health warning.

PICTs already have written health warnings on most cigarettes, with the exception of some illegally imported cigarettes, and are also starting to embrace graphic warnings, she said.

“We hope cigarettes sold in the Pacific will shortly also only be available in plain packages. The tobacco industry however isn’t giving up without a fight and uses every opportunity to challenge the initiatives known to be most effective globally.”

Ms McKenzie said FCTC is focusing on the issue of tobacco industry interference and noted that, as in the rest of the world, PICTs play an important role in demonstrating strong leadership and ensuring public health interests are paramount and at the forefront of the debate.

“With the upcoming UN Summit on NCDs (September 19–20), the world will have plenty of opportunity to reflect on the contribution that tobacco control makes to development and alleviation of poverty.”

“The Pacific is in a position to make a strong contribution to the negotiations,” she said.

For more information, contact: Jeanie McKenzie

Non-communicable Disease Adviser on Tobacco

Secretariat of the Pacific Community

Email: jeaniem@spc.int

Phone: +61 411 520118, +687 26 20 00 ext 473