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Plain packaging a 'historic step' towards smokefree generation as new research reveals one in four smokers still in doubt about health effects

New Cancer Council Victoria research released on the eve of Australia's world-first plain packaging legislation coming into effect has revealed one in four smokers still believe the health effects of smoking have been exaggerated.

The *Perceptions about the health effects of smoking and passive smoking amongst Victorian adults, 2003-2011* report has also charted the success of Australia's graphic health warnings, which are set to more than double in size from tomorrow.

From tomorrow, all cigarettes in Australia must be sold in plain packaging and the size of the warning and graphic on the front of the pack will increase to 75 per cent rather than the current 30 per cent.

Quit Victoria Executive Director Fiona Sharkie said a quarter of current smokers in 2011 believed the dangers of smoking had been exaggerated, representing a significant decline since 2009.

"Graphic health warnings have been very successful in educating smokers about the harms of smoking but it's concerning that one in four smokers still believe the dangers of smoking have been exaggerated," she said.

"But from tomorrow, the outside of cigarette packaging will finally reflect the ugliness of what's inside and leave no smoker in any doubt of how deadly cigarettes are. The promise is in the pack."

The report also found:

- While half of current smokers could spontaneously recall lung cancer as an illness caused by smoking, only one in ten smokers could link throat cancer and mouth cancer with smoking.
- One in ten smokers do not believe or aren't sure that smoking causes illness
- Almost two-thirds of all smokers do not spontaneously identify that smoking causes emphysema and heart disease/attack.
- Only 14% of smokers could spontaneously link smoking with stroke/vascular disease.

Ms Sharkie said the larger graphic health warnings were already beginning to make an impact in terms of making smoking less appealing.

"While the main intent of plain packaging is to reduce the appeal of smoking among youth, we've already had several calls to the Quitline from smokers who say the graphic health warnings have pushed them to quit," she said.

For more information or to arrange an interview with Fiona Sharkie, Jerril Rechter or Todd Harper, please contact Quit Victoria Media Relations Co-ordinator Jessica Craven on 0400 424 559 or VicHealth Senior Media Officer Jane Gardner on 0435 761 732

VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter said plain packaging was a historic step towards a smokefree generation.

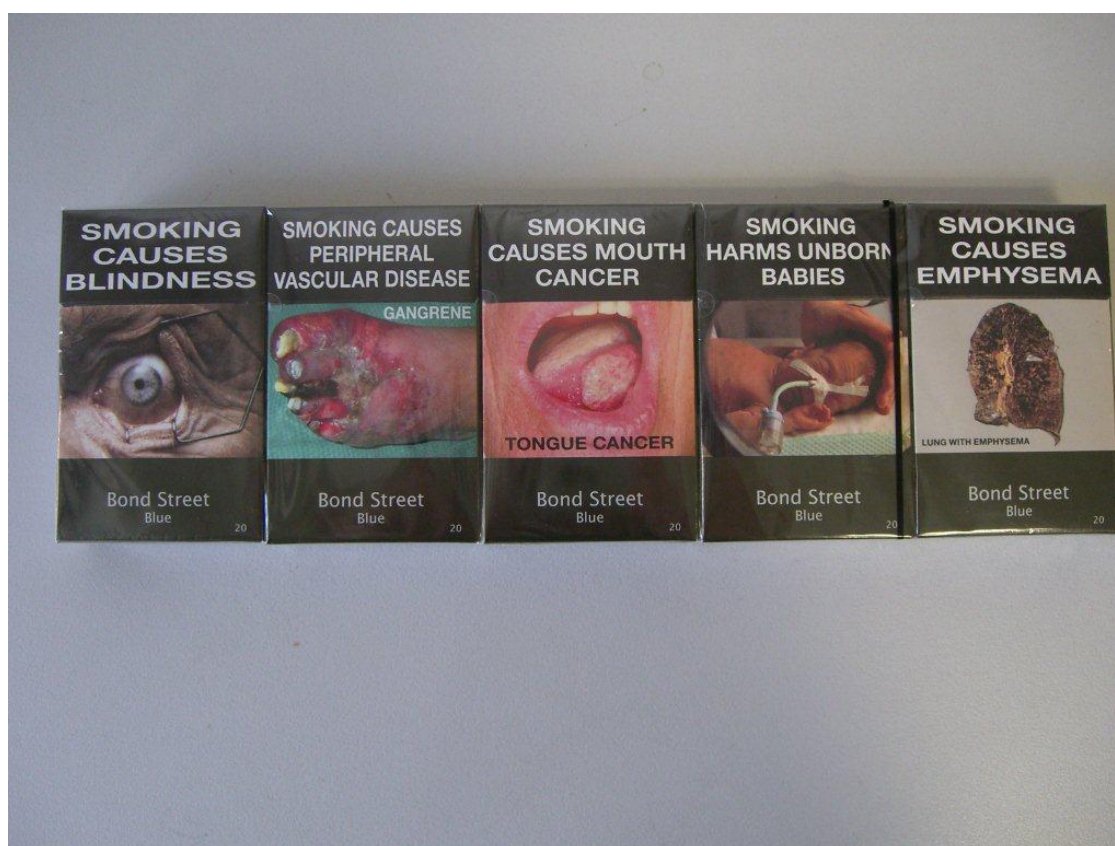
“Other countries are already looking to follow Australia’s lead and will be watching its implementation closely,” she said.

“Australia’s strong progress over time in tobacco control has resulted in Australia having among the lowest smoking rates in the world. This is something to be very proud of.”

Cancer Council Victoria CEO Todd Harper said the tobacco industry would no longer be able to use cigarette packets as mini-billboards to spruik their deadly product, particularly in recruiting image-conscious young people.

“Now the industry’s last major advertising vehicle is gone. Cigarette packs will finally reflect the grim reality of a life cut short by smoking,” he said

“This major tobacco control reform is a vital step in reducing the desirability of a product that kills one in every two long-term users and causes 80-90% of lung cancers, Victoria’s biggest cancer killer.”



Australia's world-first plain packaging

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