

Media Release

RETAIL COMPLIANCE CAN REDUCE ADOLESCENT SMOKING RATES

New research reinforces the notion that strategies to maintain high retailer compliance with legislation prohibiting cigarette sales to minors effectively reduce adolescent smoking rates.

The study, *'Reducing adolescent smoking rates, maintaining high retail compliance results in substantial improvements'* conducted by Douglas Tutt, Lyndon Bauer, Chris Edwards and Don Cook is published in the latest edition of the Health Promotion Journal of Australia.

"The results clearly demonstrate that to successfully reduce adolescent smoking rates, the supply side of the equation must also be addressed," says Douglas Tutt of Central Coast Health Promotion Unit in NSW. "Our focus centered on what happens when interventions are made on the supply side of sales to minors. The results indicate that the key is to make smoking inconvenient for teens."

According to Tutt, high profile enforcement and publicity are effective and certainly need to continue. When the number of retailers willing to sell to minors in a given area is close to zero, obtaining cigarettes becomes difficult and inconvenient.

"It is necessary to work with retailers who sell cigarettes to make sales to minors less attractive. Increasing retailer awareness of their legal obligations and highly publicised prosecutions have meant that fewer people are willing to take the risk of selling to minors."

The study, which took place between 1993 and 1999, revealed that by maintaining high retailer legislative compliance at 90%, smoking rates among teens declined considerably. The most significant change was in the younger, 12 and 13 year old age group. For instance, rates for 12 year olds decreased from 13.1% in 1993 to 9% in 1996. What is interesting is that rates across all age groups dropped by 1999. For 16 year olds, rates decreased from 34 to 25% between 1993 and 1999. Compliance was affected by campaigns to increase retailer awareness of their legal obligations and publicising retailer prosecutions.

"The evidence clearly supports requiring each jurisdiction in Australia to have a comprehensive licensing system for tobacco retail outlets. This includes having a compulsory training program for sellers to prevent tobacco sales to minors and regular compliance surveys with compliance rates of 90% or more. A commitment to long term action will produce the greatest outcomes in reducing sales to minors."

"I think it becomes clear that efforts to reduce the number of outlets willing to sell cigarettes to minors are required in addition to school education programs, media campaigns and advertising restrictions. This is a powerful intervention at a local level, with considerable potential to reduce national teenage uptake."

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