

Budget Decisions for a Tobacco-Free Ireland

Pre-Budget Submission

RCPI Policy Group on Tobacco

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1. About the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland

RCPI has a longstanding record of leadership in the area of public health policy. We have convened several policy groups comprised of members, fellows and trainees from a range of medical specialities within RCPI; representatives from other medical and healthcare professions; and relevant advocacy organisations. Members of these groups have worked together to review the scale of a range of public health and healthcare-related issues in Ireland, to examine the evidence for effective interventions and to develop recommendations to prevent illness and to promote wellbeing amongst the public.

As a healthcare organisation representing thousands of doctors on the frontline of our health services, we represent a patient-focused, independent voice in the national debate on addressing the harm caused by tobacco. Members of the RCPI Policy Group on Tobacco are doctors working in the Irish health system, many of whom treat patients with serious cardiovascular and respiratory diseases and cancers caused by smoking. Our doctors want to take action to prevent more lives being lost by reviewing the latest evidence and proposing practical ways to reduce smoking prevalence in Ireland.

The RCPI Policy Group on Tobacco was established in 2014 and is chaired by Prof Des Cox, Consultant in Paediatric Respiratory Medicine at Children's Health Ireland, Crumlin.

This group has been a strong supporter of Tobacco Free Ireland (2013), the first policy document to be launched under the Healthy Ireland framework and which has set a target for Ireland to be tobacco free (i.e. with a smoking prevalence rate of less than 5%) by the year 2025.

The group has also supported the introduction of standardised packaging for tobacco products and legislation to ban smoking in cars with children present, among other measures.

2. Summary of recommendations

Ireland is a world leader in tobacco control. Ireland was the first country in the world to introduce a Workplace Smoking Ban in 2004 and the first country in Europe to introduce legislation for standardised packaging for cigarettes.

In 2013, the Irish government set out the goal of becoming tobacco free (reducing the national smoking prevalence rate to 5%) by 2025.¹ Ireland's tobacco control success story can easily change if by 2025, Ireland is significantly off this 5% target. There is opportunity now to clarify the actions Ireland can take to come close to that 5% prevalence target from the current prevalence of 17%. Fiscal measures are one important component of these actions.

In light of the current COVID-19 pandemic, it is even more important that we strongly encourage people to quit smoking. There is now robust evidence that smokers are at a higher risk of severe complications with COVID-19 infection.² Smokers are more likely to have significant cardiopulmonary co-morbidities which means they are more likely to be hospitalised and have a more severe outcomes compared with non-smokers.³ There is also evidence demonstrating that smokers have a more prolonged recovery from COVID-19 and are more likely to experience sequelae including neurological disability.⁴ In addition, the very act of smoking itself involves fingers touching lips which increases the possibility of viral transmission.

In order to reaffirm our status as a world leader in tobacco control, Ireland needs to be able to point to Government commitments to tobacco control and smoking cessation initiatives that will make significant progress towards a 5% smoking prevalence.

¹ <https://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/TobaccoFreeIreland.pdf>

² Vardavas CI, Nikitara K. COVID-19 and smoking: A systematic review of the evidence. *Tob Induc Dis.* 2020;18:20. Published 2020 Mar 20. doi:10.18332/tid/119324

³ Reddy RK, Charles WN, Sklavounos A, Dutt A, Seed PT, Khajuria A. The effect of smoking on COVID-19 severity: A systematic review and meta-analysis [published online ahead of print, 2020 Aug 4]. *J Med Virol.* 2020;10.1002/jmv.26389. doi:10.1002/jmv.26389

⁴ Archie, S.R., Cucullo, L., 2020. Cerebrovascular and Neurological Dysfunction under the Threat of COVID-19: Is There a Comorbid Role for Smoking and Vaping?. *International Journal of Molecular Sciences.* doi:10.3390/ijms2111391

Recommendations for Budget 2020

1. The Royal College of Physicians of Ireland recommends a minimum of €1 increase on a packet of 20 cigarettes and a proportionate increase on related products on an annual basis. The revenue generated from this additional tax should be ring-fenced for funding health services.
2. An elimination of the price differential between roll your own products (RYO) and cigarettes is also a priority.
3. Introduction of an environmental levy on tobacco products.
4. Increased funding for anti-smuggling measures to ensure the price increases have the desired result of reducing smoking prevalence.
5. A substantial increase in funding for advertising campaigns promoting an anti-tobacco message is needed.
6. We recommend that significant funding be ring-fenced for research. Innovative approaches may be needed to reach the 5% target and must be underpinned by research. We are recommending that a research fund of approximately €500,000 over the next five years (indexed to the annual tax income on tobacco products) be created for the purpose of generating new tobacco control measures that will support the government in its move towards the goal of a tobacco free Ireland. This should include research into e-cigarettes to understand their potential harms and benefits as smoking cessation tools.

3. The healthcare burden of tobacco

- According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), there are approximately one billion smokers worldwide and tobacco related diseases remain the leading causes of preventable deaths.⁶
- We know that one in every two people who smoke will die from a smoking-related disease.⁷ Irish research shows that in 2013, a total of 5,950 premature deaths were attributed to smoking and exposure to second-hand smoke, along with over 200,000 hospital episodes.⁷
- The economic costs to the state are significant. It is estimated that the total cost to the health service is over €460 million. The total estimated cost of lost productivity is over €1 billion.⁸
- Despite these serious health effects, a significant proportion of the population are current smokers (just under 1 in 5 people). The most recent Healthy Ireland Survey (2019)⁹ found that
 - 17% of those surveyed are current smokers, with 14% smoking daily and 3% occasionally.
 - Prevalence of smoking has declined from 23% in 2015 to 17% in 2019.
 - 46% of all who have smoked in the past 12 months have made an attempt to quit during that period and 25% of attempts to quit have been successful.
 - 67% of those who have tried to quit smoking in the past 12 months did so due to concerns about their health.

⁶ <https://www.who.int/gho/tobacco/use/en/>

⁷ <https://ash.ie/2018/03/30/one-in-two-people-who-smokes-will-die-from-a-smoking-related-disease/>

⁸ An assessment of the economic cost of smoking in Ireland (2016). ICF International.

⁹ IPSOS MRBI Healthy Ireland Survey (2019).

4. Tobacco-Free by 2025

- Tobacco control has been a major political success story for Ireland, particularly in relation to the ban on smoking in workplaces, which placed Ireland as a world leader in tobacco control, making international headlines for all the right reasons.
- Ireland was the first country in the world to introduce this Workplace Smoking Ban in 2004 and the first country in Europe to introduce legislation for standardised packaging for cigarettes.
- In 2013, the Irish government set out the goal of becoming tobacco free (reducing the national smoking prevalence rate to 5%) by 2025.¹
- Decreases in prevalence have been realised; at the time Tobacco Free Ireland was published, smoking prevalence was 22% while the most recent Healthy Ireland survey reports a smoking prevalence of 17%.⁹
- Successive increases in excise duty on tobacco products have contributed to this reduction, as have tobacco cessation initiatives.
- Other legislative measures such as the ban on smoking in workplaces, introduction of standardised packaging and the more recent ban on smoking in cars with children present¹⁰ highlight the political commitment to reducing the use of this extremely harmful product.
- However, Ireland's tobacco control success story can easily change if by 2025, Ireland is significantly off the 5% target and unable to adequately account for it. There is opportunity now to clarify what key steps Ireland can take to come close to that 5% prevalence target.

¹⁰ <https://health.gov.ie/healthy-ireland/tobacco/smoking-in-cars-with-children-present/>

5. Recommendations for budget 2020

To reduce the prevalence of smoking, its associated health effects, and the economic costs to the state, we recommend the following measures for inclusion in Budget 2019.

1. The Royal College of Physicians of Ireland recommends a minimum of €1 increase on a packet of 20 cigarettes and a proportionate increase on related products on an annual basis. The revenue generated from this additional tax should be ring-fenced for funding health services.
2. An elimination of the price differential between roll your own products (RYO) and cigarettes.
3. Introduction of an environmental levy on all tobacco products.
4. Increased funding for anti-smuggling measures to ensure the price increases have the desired result of reducing smoking prevalence.
5. A substantial increase in funding for advertising campaigns promoting an anti-tobacco message is needed. Increased investment is also needed in tobacco cessation programmes that have been proven to work - for example the HSE's tobacco cessation programme.¹¹
6. We recommend that significant funding be ring-fenced for research. We are recommending the creation of a research fund of approximately €500,000 over the next five years (indexed to the annual tax income on tobacco products).

5.1. Excise duty

- RCPI continues to support the view expressed in Tobacco Free Ireland that the excise duty charged on both manufactured cigarettes and roll your own (RYO) tobacco should be increased in each budget.
- We are asking for an increase of one euro on a pack of 20 cigarettes and a proportionate increase on related products on an annual basis.

¹¹ <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/tobaccocontrol/cessation/tobacco-cessation-support-programme.pdf>

- The revenue generated from the tax on tobacco products should be ring-fenced for funding health services managing tobacco related diseases.
- We also request that at each budget the opportunity is taken to reduce the differential between manufactured cigarettes and RYO tobacco.
- When tax is increased on manufactured cigarettes, there is a fear that many smokers switch to RYO tobacco as a cheaper alternative. In Ireland, we have seen a significant increase in the use of RYO tobacco since 2008.
- RYO tobacco contains just as many toxins as manufactured cigarettes and there is no reason why less tax should be placed on RYO tobacco.
- Evidence shows that, just like manufactured cigarettes, increases in RYO cigarettes leads to decreases in consumption rates.¹²
- Addressing these inequalities will lead to decrease in the overall prevalence of smoking in Ireland.

5.2. Environmental levy on all tobacco products

- The environmental impacts of cigarettes cause extensive harms to the environment across the lifecycle of tobacco; from production to cultivation farming, to manufacturing, transport and through to consumer waste.
- Cigarette butts are the most commonly discarded piece of waste globally and pose a serious litter and toxic waste disposal problem.
- Globally, cigarette butts have consistently comprised 30–40% of all items picked up in annual international coastal and urban clean-ups.
- The cost to the state of responding to cigarette litter in Ireland is estimated to be around €69 million (Kearney, 2016).
- The World Health Organization recommends action on the environmental impact of tobacco including “the implementation of extended producer responsibility regulations on the tobacco industry to reduce, mitigate and prevent manufacturing and post-consumption tobacco product waste (WHO, 2017)”.

¹² Cornelsen L, Normand C. Is roll-your-own tobacco substitute for manufactured cigarettes: evidence from Ireland? *Journal of Public Health*. Vol. 36, No. 1, pp. 65 –71. doi:10.1093/pubmed/fdt030

- Tobacco manufacturers should be made financially responsible for cleaning up and safely disposing of tobacco product waste.
- We recommend that an environmental levy is placed on all tobacco products.

5.3. Anti- tobacco advertising campaigns and cessation services

- Multiple studies have demonstrated the positive impact of anti-tobacco advertising campaigns on getting people to quit smoking.^{13 14 15}
- Mass media campaigns are cost effective, result in more adults quitting smoking and lead to significant decreases in health-care related costs due to smoking related illnesses.
- The QUIT campaign in Ireland has been very successful in promoting and advertising the dangers of tobacco smoking.
- An evaluation of the QUIT campaign in 2018 found that the campaign was performing ahead of industry norms for public awareness campaigns with a 71% awareness among its key target group.
- The total spend for the QUIT campaign including all media advertising in 2018 was €1.5 million, an overall decrease compared to 2017.¹⁶
- This figure needs to be doubled to €3 million if we are to reach the goal of a Tobacco Free Ireland by 2025.
- The high impact national media campaigns created by QUIT.ie need to be supported and sustained moving forward.

¹³ Wakefield MA, Durkin S, Spittal MJ, et al. Impact of tobacco control policies and mass media campaigns on monthly adult smoking prevalence. *Am J Public Health*. 2008; 98(8):1443–1450

¹⁴ National Cancer Institute. The role of the media in promoting and reducing tobacco use. Tobacco Control Monograph No 19 (NIH Pub No 07-6242). Bethesda, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute; 2008.

¹⁵ Wakefield MA, Loken B, Hornik RC. Use of mass media campaigns to change health behaviour. *Lancet*. 2010 published online October 7. 10.1016/S0140-6736(10)60809-4

¹⁶ <https://health.gov.ie/blog/publications/tobacco-free-ireland-annual-report-2018/>

- We are recommending that the budgeting for the QUIT campaign be increased to €3m per year.
- We also recommend increased investment in tobacco cessation programmes that have been proven to work- for example the HSEs tobacco cessation programme.¹⁷
- Increased taxation on tobacco products should result in increased revenue for public health programmes and advertising campaigns to assist in tobacco control.
- The increased funding to tobacco cessation services and advertising campaigns will result in better health outcomes for people who decide to quit smoking. This will lead to dramatic savings and decrease the significant burden of tobacco related diseases on our healthcare system.

5.4. Ring-fenced funding for research

- In Ireland, there is a long history of strong anti-tobacco legislative measures being introduced by successive governments and Ireland leads the way in tobacco control in many respects.
- However, there is no ring-fenced funding for research into tobacco control research in Ireland despite tobacco being the leading cause of preventable deaths nationally.
- The prevalence of tobacco smoking is decreasing over time due to increased taxation on tobacco products and strict legislative measures.
- As prevalence reduces, the incremental challenge in effecting further reductions increases as many of the big policy levers have been deployed.
- We will need to get smarter in our response and new knowledge through research will be instrumental. Therefore, further research is needed into how we can decrease our prevalence further and to better inform government policy going forward.
- Although tobacco control measures in Ireland have been extremely successful to date, challenges remain if Ireland is to continue to be a world leader on tobacco control.

¹⁷ <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/tobaccocontrol/cessation/>

- The trends of tobacco smoking are changing worldwide, and more research is needed to study which evidence-based strategies to reduce tobacco smoking will work best in Ireland.
- Innovative approaches may be needed to reach the 5% target for smoking prevalence and must be underpinned by research.
- We are recommending that a research fund of approximately €500,000 over the next five years be created for the purpose of generating new tobacco control measures that will support the government in its move towards the goal of a tobacco free Ireland.
- The amount should be indexed to the excise tax income on tobacco products. In 2017, this tax income was €1,397million. An annual allocation of 0.01% of the annual excise tax income to this research fund would meet this €500,000 target.
- We recommend that this fund be co-ordinated through the Health Research Board (HRB) and be designated specifically for researchers in the area of tobacco control.

Members of the RCPI Policy Group on Tobacco

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Dr Angie Brown	Irish Heart Foundation
Dr Carmen Regan	Institute of Obstetrics and Gynaecologists
Dr Mark O' Kelly	Irish College of General Practitioners
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