

# Public support for putting tobacco products in plain packaging



## Summary

1. Published, peer reviewed scientific research shows that plain packaging for tobacco products is less attractive to young people, less misleading about the health risks of smoking and makes health warnings more effective.
2. The Australian government is developing legislation to introduce plain packaging for tobacco products from 2012.
3. The UK Government is investigating requiring tobacco product to be sold in plain packaging.
4. A recent survey from YouGov suggests that public support for plain packing is strong, if evidence of its benefits exists. This research already exists.
  - Almost two thirds (64%) would support plain packaging if there is evidence that plain packs are less likely to give the false impression that one type of cigarette is safer than another
  - Three quarters (75%) would support if there is evidence that plain packs make health warnings more effective
  - Four fifths (80%) would support if there is evidence that plain packs are less attractive to children and young people than branded packs

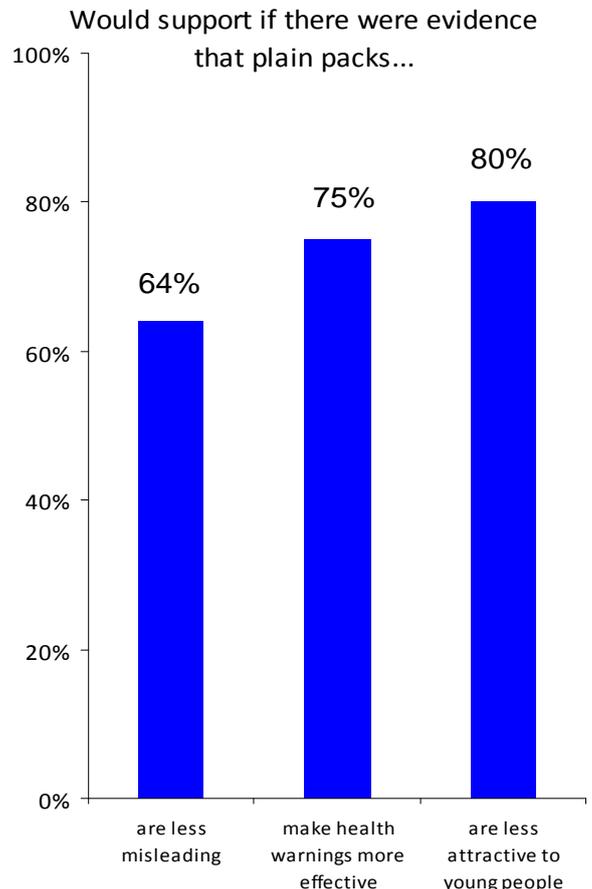
## The public support plain packaging

When respondents were asked if they would support or oppose plain packaging “if there was evidence that plain packs were less likely to give the false impression that one type of cigarette is safer than another” 64% said they would support the measure. When asked “if there were evidence that it improved the effectiveness of health warnings,” support rose to 75%, and if there were evidence that it made cigarettes less attractive to children and young people the proportion supporting rose to 80%.

Smokers are also more likely to be supportive if there is evidence that plain packs would be effective, particularly if they would be effective in making smoking less attractive to children and young people. Under these conditions 64% of daily smokers would support the introduction of plain packaging.

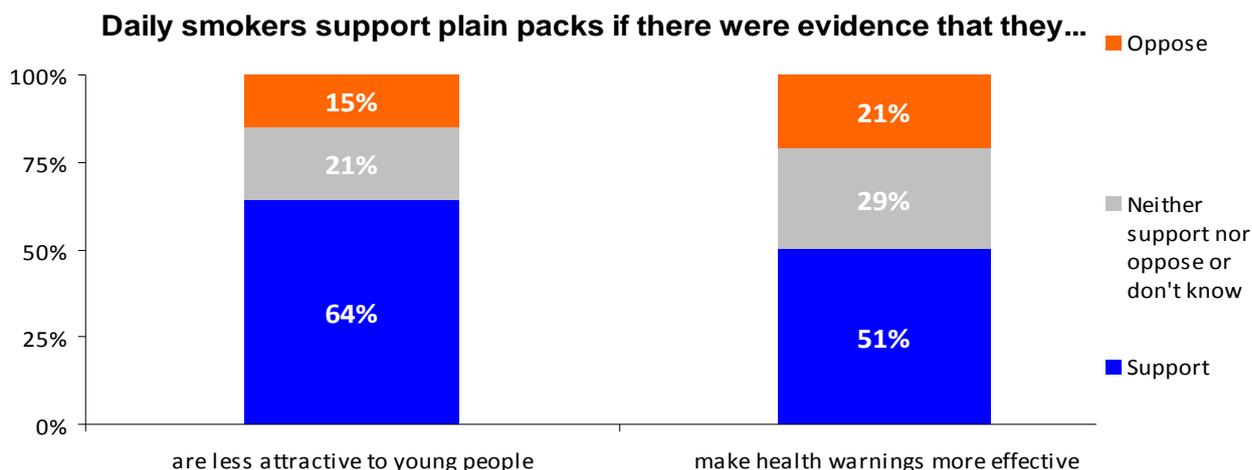
There are clear parallels for support for smokefree legislation, which stood at a little over 50% when the Health Bill was introduced in England. By the time the law was introduced in 2007 support had grown to over 75% as public understanding of the benefits improved. Since implementation support has risen to 80%, rising fastest among smokers.<sup>1</sup>

Previous research commissioned by ASH in 2008 found that plain packs attracted less support than other tobacco



control measures. 43% of adults supported the introduction of plain packaging and 17% opposed it. The remaining 40% either didn't know or neither supported nor opposed the proposition. Support for plain packs was higher among non smokers although even among smokers opposition was weak (33% opposed 21% supported).<sup>2</sup>

Qualitative research conducted for the same report showed that people tended to support policies that were easily enforced, not costly to the public purse and did not infringe adult civil liberties unless the health of children and young people is at risk. This survey shows that public support for plain packaging is growing and set to grow further as public understanding increases.



## Research shows plain packaging is less misleading and less attractive

As part of a far reaching public health strategy, the Australian government propose tobacco control measures including plain packaging.<sup>3</sup> This would make Australia the first country to adopt the measure. In their report *Taking preventative action* the Australian government stated:

*“Plain packaging will:*

- *increase the noticeability, recall and impact of health warning messages;*
- *reduce the ability of packaging to mislead consumers to believe that some products may be less harmful than others;*
- *reduce the attractiveness of the tobacco product, for both adults and children; and*
- *reduce the appeal and desirability of smoking generally.”<sup>4</sup>*

The public health white paper for England *Healthy lives healthy people* stated

*“Since the prohibition of tobacco advertising, the only way that tobacco products can be promoted is at the point of sale. The Government will look at whether the plain packaging of tobacco products could be an effective way to reduce the number of young people taking up smoking and to help those who are trying to quit smoking.”<sup>5</sup>*

Although to the general public in the UK, plain packaging is an unknown quantity, there is a growing body of research evidence supporting its benefits. Peer reviewed studies have found that compared to current branding, plain packaging for tobacco products reduces false beliefs about the relative harm of tobacco products, is less attractive, especially to young people, improves the effectiveness of health warnings and may discourage youth smoking uptake.

- **Less misleading:** Plain packs significantly reduce false beliefs about health risk and ease of quitting, and young people rate them as significantly less attractive and appealing for trying smoking than branded packs. Adults and young people (11-17 year olds) are significantly more likely to rate 'silver' and 'gold' packs as lower tar, lower health risk and either easier to quit smoking (adults) or their choice of pack if trying smoking (youth).<sup>6 7 8</sup>
- **Less attractive, especially to young people:** Following the introduction of advertising bans, tobacco manufacturers have increasingly turned to packaging to make their products more

attractive. In a study comparing existing branded packs with plain cardboard packs with the name and number of cigarettes in small standard font, plain packs were found to be significantly less attractive. There is evidence that even with an advertising ban in place, packaging encourages youth smoking.<sup>9 10 11 12 13 14 15</sup>

- **Improves the effectiveness of health warnings:** Reducing the extent of branding on cigarette packaging progressively increases the effect of health warnings as does increasing the size of warnings. Of 13 options tested in one study, plain packs (with large warnings) were significantly more likely to lead to behaviours associated with quitting.<sup>16 17 18 19</sup>

It is widely believed both by tobacco control professionals and by industry analysts that, like legislation on smokefree public places, once the first country adopts legislation other jurisdictions are likely to follow.<sup>20</sup>

## How this survey was conducted

The poll was a representative sample of 2,328 adults and was carried out by YouGov for ASH. Fieldwork was undertaken between 29th October - 1st November 2010. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+)

Participants were asked:

*If there was evidence that plain packs were likely to discourage children and young people from taking up smoking, how strongly, if at all, would you support or oppose making tobacco companies sell their cigarettes in standard plain packs?*

*If there was evidence that plain packs make health warnings more effective, how strongly, if at all, would you support or oppose making tobacco companies sell their cigarettes in standard plain packs?*

*It is now against the law to use terms like "light" and "mild" on cigarette packs because they give the misleading impression that these types of cigarettes are less harmful than full strength ones. However, colour coding can still be used to signal the strength of cigarettes, as in the image above. If there was evidence that plain packs were less likely to give the false impression that one type of cigarette is safer than another. How strongly, if at all, would you support or oppose making tobacco companies sell their cigarettes in standard plain packs?*

*If there was evidence that plain packs were less attractive to children and young people than branded packs, how strongly, if at all, would you support or oppose making tobacco companies sell their cigarettes in standard plain packs?*

ASH, March 2011

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- <sup>1</sup> Passive Smoking and Children, Royal College of Physicians 2010
- <sup>2</sup> Beyond Smoking Kills: Protecting Children, Reducing Inequalities. London, ASH, 2008
- <sup>3</sup> Australia: The healthiest country by 2020. Technical Report 2, Tobacco control in Australia making smoking history. Commonwealth of Australia 2009
- <sup>4</sup> Taking Preventative Action: A response to Australia: the healthiest country by 2020  
[http://www.preventativehealth.org.au/internet/preventativehealth/publishing.nsf/Content/6B7B17659424FBE5CA25772000095458/\\$File/tpa.pdf](http://www.preventativehealth.org.au/internet/preventativehealth/publishing.nsf/Content/6B7B17659424FBE5CA25772000095458/$File/tpa.pdf)
- <sup>5</sup> Healthy lives healthy people – Our strategy for public health in England Healthy lives healthy people – Our strategy for public health in England  
[http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod\\_consum\\_dh/groups/dh\\_digitalassets/@dh/@en/@ps/documents/digitalasset/dh\\_122347.pdf](http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/@ps/documents/digitalasset/dh_122347.pdf)
- <sup>6</sup> Hammond D, Dockrell M, Arnott D, Lee A, McNeill A. Cigarette pack design and perceptions of risk among UK adults and youth Eur J Public Health. 2009 Dec;19(6):631-7.
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- <sup>8</sup> Hastings G, Galopel-Morvan K, Rey JM. The plain truth about tobacco packaging Tob Control 2008;17:361-362
- <sup>9</sup> Good G, Global Brand Director, Imperial Tobacco UBS Tobacco Conference December 1, 2006 London
- <sup>10</sup> Wakefield MA, Letcher T. My pack is cuter than your pack Tob Control 2002 11: 154-156
- <sup>11</sup> Wakefield MA, Germain D, Durkin SJ. How does increasingly plainer cigarette packaging influence adult smokers' perceptions about brand image? An experimental study. Tob Control. 2008 Dec;17(6):416-21
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- <sup>13</sup> Moodie C, Mackintosh AM, Brown A, et al. Tobacco marketing awareness on youth smoking susceptibility and perceived prevalence before and after an advertising ban. Eur J Public Health 2008;18:484–90.
- <sup>14</sup> Centre for Tobacco Control Research (CTCR). Point of sale display of tobacco products. London, UK: Cancer Research UK, 2008
- <sup>15</sup> Moodie C, Hastings G. Tobacco packaging as promotion Tob Control 2010;19:168-170
- <sup>16</sup> Hoek J, Wong C, Glendall P, et al Effects of dissuasive packaging on young adult smokers Tob Control published online October 21, 2010 doi: 10.1136/tc.2010.037861
- <sup>17</sup> Cunningham R, Kyle K. The case for plain packaging. Tob Control 1995;4:80–6.
- <sup>18</sup> Goldberg ME, Liefeld J, Madill J, et al. The effect of plain packaging on response to health warnings. Am J Public Health 1999;89:1434–5
- <sup>19</sup> Beede P, Lawson R. The effect of plain packages on the perception of cigarette health warnings. Public Health 1992;106: 315–22.
- <sup>20</sup> Little hope for natural justice. Tobacco Journal International 2008(4)