

# Letters to the Editor, December 4, 2017

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## Tobacco taxes alone cannot stub out habit

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The Council on Smoking and Health last week repeated its call for the tobacco tax to be doubled next year, in order to eventually stop tobacco use in Hong Kong (“[Call for Hong Kong tobacco tax hike next year, and cigarette ban in 10 years](#)”, December 1).

The council chair called on Hong Kong to follow the trend of many advanced economies that have already set targets for phasing out tobacco, and brought in innovative policies to that end. However, I don’t think just raising taxes would be an effective solution in Hong Kong.

Indeed, raising the tax is the fastest way to reduce the number of smokers in Hong Kong. The council says a 100 per cent tax hike could push smoking prevalence from 10.5 per cent in 2015 to below 5 per cent by 2027, and pave the way for a total ban.

A lot of smokers say they would quit if cigarettes became even more expensive. However, I believe this tax hike plan only addresses the symptoms, not the actual problem. The root of the problem is low public awareness, and a tendency to ignore the health effects of tobacco use.

Some of our smokers are rich enough to buy cigarettes, no matter what the price. And those too poor to afford a pack after the tax hike may be tempted to buy smuggled and illicit cigarettes, which are generally cheaper.

The government of Hong Kong needs to choose a two-pronged approach, raising the tobacco tax and also intensifying public education on the health hazards of smoking, as a more effective measure to make smokers

quit and discourage others from taking up the habit.

Other advanced economies are taking firm steps. Australia became the first country to fully implement plain packaging for cigarettes in December 2012, followed by the UK earlier this year. And Japan requires warnings on cigarette packs to describe harmful health effects.

*Desmond Chan Chun-fai, Tseung Kwan O*