

Why Tobacco Control still won't publish tobacco industry funded work, even if the funding is laundered through PMI's new 'independent' foundation

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Authors: The Tobacco Control Senior Editorial Team (listed in alphabetical order): Joaquin Barnoya, Joanna Cohen, Coral Gartner, Lisa Henriksen, Sarah Hill, Ruth E. Malone, Richard O'Connor

Tobacco Control has a normative focus: we strive to publish the best research that informs and advances public health and policy. In this spirit – and because of a long history of tobacco industry (TI) manipulation, suppression and misrepresentation of scientific data¹ – *Tobacco Control* joined a range of health journals with an explicit policy of not publishing work funded by the TI or from authors who accept TI funding.² When we established this policy in 2013 we did not anticipate the industry's creation of foundations to support their (public) research agenda. Recently, however, Philip Morris International (PMI) committed nearly US\$1bn to a new "Foundation for a Smoke-Free World," with the stated goal of funding independent research.³ In light of this development, the editors of *Tobacco Control* reaffirm our 2013 policy, and stress that it will apply to research and researchers funded by such organizations as well as to other types of contributions (such as commentaries or special communications) from TI-supported individuals. This policy is in keeping with the WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), which recognises "a fundamental and irreconcilable conflict between the tobacco industry's interests and public health policy interests."⁴

While this journal's stance may seem obvious and necessary to those familiar with the TI's egregious history of deception, others may question why the normal procedures of peer review and funding disclosure requirements are insufficient guarantors of scientific integrity and independence. Unfortunately, as discussed when the policy was instituted, these measures have been demonstrated to be insufficient to protect against TI manipulation of science to influence policies in service of profit-making.^{1,5-8} While PMI's Foundation asserts that its goal is to "accelerate global efforts to reduce health impacts and deaths from smoking",⁹ we join with others in the public health community¹⁰⁻¹³ who note that this goal could be achieved more quickly if multinational tobacco companies such as PMI: (1) committed to a timeline for phasing out commercial cigarette sales – including in low- and middle-income countries¹⁴ – with imposition of meaningful penalties for insufficient progress toward this goal, and (2) ceased fighting effective tobacco control measures that are informed by evidence published in our pages and elsewhere.¹⁵⁻¹⁷ Absent such concrete and enforceable objectives, the suggestion that there could be 'shared value' between the Foundation, whose sole sponsor is PMI, and tobacco control¹⁸ is illogical and disingenuous.

The tobacco industry will continue to exploit the harm reduction agenda to reposition itself as a legitimate stakeholder in health research and policy. Regardless of our individual views on the potential harms and benefits of emerging nicotine delivery devices (e.g., electronic cigarettes), the tobacco control community can and should agree on the need to protect public health efforts from the tobacco industry. The industry's profits continue to be built on the sale of products that have caused a pandemic of suffering, death and disease. There is nothing "new" or "fresh" about the TI's interest in promoting some products as less harmful than conventional tobacco,¹⁹ nor its efforts to advance its corporate image by funding 'independent' research organisations.²⁰ None of these tactics alters the fundamental conflict of interest between the TI and public health, and none justifies the abandonment of a core principle that has underpinned global tobacco control over the past 15 years.²¹

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