

TDs call for more holistic approach to combat smoking

RTE rte.ie/news/budget-2019/2018/1009/1001974-a-pack-of-20-cigarettes-goes-up-by-50-cents

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Opposition TDs have questioned the merits of the Government continually raising the price of cigarettes, calling for a more holistic approach.

Minister for Finance Paschal Donohoe announced a 50c increase in the excise duty on a pack of 20 cigarettes in the Budget.

The increase will bring the price of 20 cigarettes up to as much as €12.70.

Mr Donohoe said he was increasing **minimum excise duty** on tobacco products so that all cigarettes sold below €11 will have the same excise applied as cigarettes sold above €11.

In the Dáil tonight, Sinn Féin said it would not be supporting the measure, saying a more holistic approach is needed to cut down on smoking.

Cork TD Jonathan O'Brien said his party would be in favour of the measure, **if the €61.8 million that will be raised was going into programmes to prevent smoking.**

Instead, he said, it would be going into a black hole.

Labour leader Brendan Howlin noted that the number of smokers in Ireland has reduced to 18%, which he described as "enormously positive" and said pricing contributed to that reduction.

However, he said if smokers are going to be priced out of buying cigarettes, they needed to be aided regarding the addiction.

Mr Howlin also expressed concern over the "composition" of black market cigarettes, which he said may be "extraordinarily" bad for peoples' health.

Minister for Health Simon Harris said the increase in the price of cigarettes was a long-standing policy of many governments and the price rise was not the entire response from the Government regarding smoking cessation services.

Mr Harris also told the Dáil that Revenue officials seized 32.4 million cigarettes with a value of €19m last year.

He described the resolution as sensible and mature.

The Irish Heart Foundation has welcomed the increase in tobacco tax.

"Price increases are the most effective way to discourage smoking, particularly among young people, and have driven a dramatic decrease in teenage smoking rates," said Chris Macey, Head of Advocacy at the Irish Heart Foundation.

"The tobacco industry needs an estimated 50 young people to take up smoking every day in Ireland to replace those its products kill or who manage to quit. So every annual tax increase brings the end of this vile trade in Ireland a little nearer," Mr Macey said.

A spokesman for the smokers' group Forest Ireland, John Mallon, criticised the increase in tobacco duties.

"Smokers expect to pay a fair level of tax on what is a potentially unhealthy product but there is no logic in pursuing a policy that discriminates against the poor, hurts legitimate retailers and enriches criminal gangs and governments abroad," he said.