

Do not abandon new cigarette warning labels

November 8 2010

Health Canada's cancellation of plans to renew tobacco warning labels on cigarette packages may lead to increased smoking rates and smoking-related illnesses and deaths, states an editorial in CMAJ (*Canadian Medical Association Journal*).

Ten years ago, Canada was a leader in warning labels and other effective tobacco policies. Abandoning this labeling policy may be a set back for efforts in Canada, particularly as labels are now the government's only remaining mass communication initiative warning of the dangers of smoking.

"Warning labels are an effective, inexpensive communication strategy," writes Dr. Matthew Stanbrook, a respirologist and CMAJ deputy editor with Editor-in-Chief Dr. Paul Hébert. "The "dose" of information increases automatically in proportion to the amount of tobacco consumed: the more often smokers reach for a cigarette, the more often they see and are influenced by the warnings."

Warning labels also deter non-smokers from taking up smoking and can be viewed by children and youth as well as adults.

The international Framework Convention on Tobacco Control recommends large pictorial warning labels and Canada was the first country to adopt labeling regulations in compliance with these guidelines with positive results. "Knowledge of specific health consequences of smoking is twice as high among Canadian smokers compared to their counterparts in the US and UK, where warning labels do not meet the

guidelines," write the authors.

However, [warning labels](#) need to be refreshed to be effective as they lose impact over time and with repeated exposure. Countries such as Thailand and Uruguay have updated their labels several times in the last five years based on this evidence whereas Health Canada has not changed a single label over the same period in this country.

"The federal Minister of Health has previously shown leadership in getting [tobacco](#) control legislation passed through Parliament. Her leadership is needed again," they conclude.

Provided by Canadian Medical Association Journal

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