

Radical new law needed to ensure the Smokefree 2025 goal

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Sweeping changes to the Smokefree Environments legislation are proposed by University of Otago researchers in a newly published article in the *New Zealand Medical Journal*.

The researchers from the University of Otago, Wellington, propose a comprehensive new [law](#) including positive strategies that are needed to help New Zealand reach its Smokefree 2025 goal. They argue that because of inadequate action by successive New Zealand governments, the Smokefree 2025 goal is unlikely to be achieved without effective new measures and a new law.

Public health lawyer and lead researcher Louise Delany says that the proposed law is unique in its focus on the tobacco industry, on the [tobacco products](#), and its alignment with international law.

"The proposed new law would ensure that actions are taken so that the Smokefree 2025 goal of minimal tobacco use benefits all New Zealanders, including Māori and Pacific peoples," says Ms Delany.

"The law would state that, if specific prevalence reduction targets for 2020 are not reached, permission to sell tobacco would be transferred to 'not for profit' or health agencies. These agencies would be required by law to reduce sales," she says.

The University of Otago, Wellington, researchers propose that a new authority within the Ministry of Health would be responsible for

developing plans to achieve these targets and monitoring their progress.

They also suggest that the new law would set minimum tobacco prices and enable better monitoring and control of tobacco industry profits, regulate product design, and reduce or remove particular constituents in tobacco products. Such constituents could include those that increase addictiveness, palatability and attractiveness of cigarettes such as nicotine levels, sugars, menthol and other flavourings.

"The design of tobacco products is currently left up to the tobacco industry with no controls at all," says Public Health Professor Richard Edwards.

"This law would ensure that children and young people experimenting with cigarettes would be likely to find them less appealing, not so attractive to smoke and less addictive; and fewer would become regular smokers," Professor Edwards says.

A focus on the [tobacco industry](#) would ensure greater transparency and accountability for the industry's marketing, research, and profits. Provisions for the control of tobacco and nicotine supply would include the licensing of importers, wholesalers and retailers.

Another of the researchers, Professor Nick Wilson, pointed out that at present a 10-year old shop assistant can legally sell tobacco products in a dairy, and no licenses are required to sell tobacco products even if the dairy is located next to a school.

"This new law would enable government to properly control a dangerous addictive product, as it does for other dangerous products and for prescription medicines," says Professor Wilson.

The proposed law would recognise that successful strategies such as

raising tobacco prices and mass media campaigns would continue, and be enhanced. Such measures would support provisions in the new Act aiming to further promote smokefree environments (for example outdoor areas such as playgrounds) and for vehicles with young passengers.

In the same issue of the *New Zealand Medical Journal*, another study from the University of Otago, Wellington describes recent smoking trends, and shows that New Zealand will not reach SF2025 with a 'business as usual' approach. This study finds that the Ministry of Health is set to fail against its 2018 interim goals for Māori and Pacific smoking. One of the authors, Jude Ball commented "We need really bold action to make a difference in our Māori and Pacific communities, and the new legal framework being proposed could be exactly what's required."

Provided by University of Otago

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