

Study finds plain packaging helps smokers quit

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Australia introduced plain packaging of tobacco in December 2012 to help Australians quit smoking. Credit: Andreas, Flickr

Plain tobacco packaging in Australia reduced smoking and increased smoker attempts to quit the habit because it led to a fall in the way they identified with their brand, a study led by ANU has found.

Lead researcher Hugh Webb said the findings provided the first hard

data on how changes in smoker behaviour was linked to [brand](#) identity.

"Tobacco is the leading cause of preventable death globally and kills at least 5 million people every year," said Mr Webb from the ANU Research School of Psychology.

"You'd expect trying to sell a product that causes death on this scale would be difficult, and yet [tobacco companies](#) continue to sell their products with breathtaking success."

Australia introduced plain packaging of tobacco in December 2012 to help Australians quit [smoking](#). Under the laws, [tobacco products](#) have no branding and feature health warnings with graphic images.

"This world-first policy aimed to encourage smokers to quit and discourage others from taking the habit up, and early indications are that the reform is achieving some success," he said.

During the phase-in of the reforms, calls to quit-smoking helplines increased by up to 78 per cent and were above-average for about 10 months after the reforms began.

Mr Webb said smokers' identification with their brand decreased after the introduction of [plain packaging](#).

"This decrease in brand identification was associated with reduced smoking, even after taking into account the importance of health warning labels and how heavily people smoked before the change," he said.

"A smoker who identifies as a Winnie Blues Man does not just regularly purchase Winfield [tobacco](#), they also gain a positive sense of who they are by belonging to that social group."

As part of the study, 178 Australian smokers rated their sense of identification with fellow smokers of their brand, positive brand stereotypes, quitting behaviours and intentions, and smoking intensity, both before and seven months after the policy change.

More information: Hugh Webb et al. Smoke signals: The decline of brand identity predicts reduced smoking behaviour following the introduction of plain packaging, *Addictive Behaviors Reports* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.abrep.2017.02.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.abrep.2017.02.003)

Provided by Australian National University

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