

Smoking costs UK economy in excess of £19 billion a year

August 4 2021, by Luke Lambert



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A new report released by the International Longevity Centre UK (ILC) argues that anti-smoking measures could save billions across the UK economy.

Released following World Lung Cancer Day, ILC's report "[Up in smoke](#)" highlights the costs of [smoking](#) not just to individuals' health, but to the sustainability of the broader healthcare system and to the public purse as the Government aims to "build back better" from the pandemic.

Smoking is responsible for 77,600 deaths a year in England alone. While [tobacco use](#) has been declining in the UK for decades, 14.1 percent of UK adults still smoke and many former smokers are living with the long-term effects of smoking, such as cardiovascular conditions and cancer.

"Up in smoke" by ILC, the UK's specialist think tank on the impact of longevity on society, finds that:

- A typical life-long smoker aged 30 can expect to lose about 10 years of life expectancy compared to someone who has never smoked.
- Men who have never smoked enjoy five extra years of life free from disability than current or ex-smokers, and this rises to 5.8 years for women.
- The health impacts of smoking limit many people's ability to work—if current or ex-smokers had never smoked, overall earnings could be 1.9 percent higher, boosting the UK economy by £19.1 billion every year.

In July 2019, the Government stated its ambition of going "smoke-free" in England by 2030. However, at the same time, funding for national behavior change communications campaigns and smoking cessation services has dropped significantly since austerity measures were put in place in 2009.

ILC argue that to follow through with its pledge to go "smoke-free," the Government needs to:

- Raise the legal age for purchasing tobacco to 21 (and gradually introduce further raises in the future).
- Reduce tobacco affordability by increasing UK tobacco tax each year in stages from the current level of RPI +2 percent to RPI +5 percent.
- Reduce the size of the illicit market by introducing a [tobacco](#) licensing system for retailers and wholesalers.
- Support smoking cessation programs and behavior change campaigns at the local level.

Professor Les Mayhew, Head of Global Research at ILC and Professor of Statistics at The Business School (formerly Cass), argued:

"It's no secret that smoking is bad for our health, but what is lesser known is that it's also bad for our economy. We need people to stay healthy for longer and despite a decline in smoking we are not out of the woods yet."

"The pandemic has shown that smokers and ex-smokers are more likely to end up in hospital if they have COVID. Over the life course they work fewer years, are less productive and quit work sooner. Their later years are more likely to be marred by ill health which means less time for consumption, volunteering and community work."

Provided by City University London

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