

Make more outdoor pedestrian spaces smokefree, researchers urge

October 22 2021



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Creating large smokefree outdoor pedestrian spaces would aid the health sector's efforts to help people quit smoking, researchers say.

Associate Professor George Thomson, from the University of Otago,

Wellington, says New Zealand is more than 10 years behind many Australian and North American jurisdictions in making pedestrian malls and plazas smokefree. This is despite New Zealand's Smokefree 2025 goal of having less than five percent of the population smoking by the year 2025—in only three years' time.

Associate Professor Thomson says experience from overseas demonstrates that people using smokefree outdoor areas are more likely to be able to quit smoking, there is less tobacco-related litter, and there are fewer people smoking.

He says that the 2003 national legislation requiring the grounds of New Zealand schools and [early childhood education](#) centers to be smokefree has worked well, and the new tobacco control law promised for next year should include a range of outdoor areas.

Exposure to [second-hand smoke](#) remains a serious problem in New Zealand and smoking outside bars makes it particularly difficult for those who have quit smoking and are trying to remain tobacco-free.

The researchers publish the results of their survey of 60 outdoor pedestrian-only spaces in 10 local government areas in this week's *New Zealand Medical Journal*.

They surveyed five sites each in Hastings, Napier, Palmerston North, Masterton, South Wairarapa, Porirua, Upper Hutt and Queenstown Lakes and 10 each in Hutt City and Wellington.

Of these, 63 percent were officially designated smokefree by local councils. However, smokefree signage was only present in 15 percent of the total sites and in 24 percent of the designated smokefree sites. Many of the signs were small, and were sometimes only a note on another sign. Fewer than half of the signs contained te reo Māori and none covered

vaping (despite half of the 10 councils having vape-free policies for these areas).

Associate Professor Thomson says even when councils introduced smoke-free policies for outdoor areas, they remained 'educational' because they were not backed by council bylaws or national legislation.

"More pedestrian spaces in New Zealand towns and cities need to be effectively smoke-free, with a law well communicated, to help de-normalize [smoking](#) and support people who are quitting."

Fellow researcher Professor Nick Wilson says national smoke-free legislation for outdoor public spaces would have the advantage of providing consistent messaging throughout the country.

"It could also be integrated with national smoke-free media campaigns and give economies of scale through centralized sign production and distribution."

Associate Professor Thomson says national legislation could make all outdoor pedestrianized plazas, malls and boulevards smoke-free and vape-free and require that all sites had smoke-free signs that met minimum government specifications.

"Smoking in areas like these is inconsistent with local government efforts to make their localities more attractive to workers, shoppers and tourists; to have a healthier and more productive population; and to improve the environment with reduced tobacco-related pollution and litter," Associate Professor Thomson says.

The study is thought to be the first to survey the smoke-free status of outdoor pedestrianized areas in Australasia.

More information: A survey of the smokefree status of pedestrian-only spaces in 10 New Zealand local government areas. *New Zealand Medical Journal*. [journal.nzma.org.nz/journal-ar ... cal-government-areas](http://journal.nzma.org.nz/journal-article/doi/10.7766/nzma/2021/135/1253)

Provided by University of Otago

Citation: Make more outdoor pedestrian spaces smokefree, researchers urge (2021, October 22) retrieved 20 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-10-outdoor-pedestrian-spaces-smokefree-urge.html>

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