

Standardised cigarette packs trigger 'rise in Quitline calls'

20 January 2014



(Medical Xpress)—Plain, standardised tobacco packaging sparked a 78 per cent increase in calls to an Australian stop-smoking helpline just one month after its introduction, figures in the *Medical Journal of Australia* show.

The study by the University of Sydney and the Cancer Institute New South Wales (NSW) found that calls to the NSW Quitline rose from 363 a week to a peak of 651 in the four weeks after standard [packs](#) were introduced.

David Currow, chief executive of the Cancer Institute NSW, said the study suggests that standardised [tobacco packaging](#) could bring the same health benefits as previous moves to combat the harmful effects of smoking, such as the introduction of smoke-free areas and mass media campaigns.

The inclusion of graphic warnings on packs in 2006 prompted an 84 per cent increase in calls. But according to study author Professor Jane Young, scientific director at the Cancer Institute NSW, the effect of standardised packaging was "more immediate and for longer" compared with the

warnings.

The increase could not be attributed to seasonal trends, anti-tobacco advertising, cigarette costliness or the number of smokers in the community.

Australia is the first country in the world to bring in such legislation. Products manufactured since October 2012, and all on sale since December 1, 2012, must be sold in standardised packs.

Mr Currow said: "The impact of plain packaging appears to be significant, immediate and sustained."

Studies have yet to be completed into how many people have given up smoking since the introduction of standardised packaging in Australia, and for how long.

Professor Young added: "Our study demonstrates real behaviour change following the introduction of plain packaging, which is one incremental but important measure of the broader impact of this policy. We did not just measure what people think or intend to do - we saw real action among smokers to quit, which is very encouraging."

Alison Cox, Cancer Research UK's head of tobacco policy, said: "These results provide further evidence of the impact of tobacco packaging. Our research has already shown that plain, standardised packs make health messaging more prominent and this data gives an insight into the number of smokers who've gone on to ask for help to quit after standard packs were rolled out across the country.

"Cancer Research UK wants to protect children from tobacco marketing and standardised packs will help do this. The evidence is clear that putting all tobacco in uniform packaging with large picture health warnings will give millions of children one less reason to start smoking. We urge the UK

government to introduce standardised packaging as soon as possible."

More information: Young J, et al. (2014).

Association between tobacco plain packaging and Quitline calls: a population-based, interrupted time-series analysis, *Med J Aust*, 200 (1) 29-32. [DOI: 10.5694/mja13.11070](https://doi.org/10.5694/mja13.11070)

Provided by Cancer Research UK

APA citation: Standardised cigarette packs trigger 'rise in Quitline calls' (2014, January 20) retrieved 26 September 2020 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-01-standardised-cigarette-trigger-quitline.html>

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