

Cutting smoking rates could save the NHS GBP67 million a year

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Credit: Vera Kratochvil/public domain

If smoking rates dropped to five per cent in the UK by 2035, the NHS could save £67million in just one year, according to research published in *Tobacco Control* today.

Researchers at the UK Health Forum, commissioned by Cancer Research UK, examined the health and economic impact of the UK

becoming 'tobacco-free' - where less than five per cent of the population smoke.

The study predicts that achieving this target would avoid nearly 100,000 new cases of [smoking](#)-related disease including 35,900 cancers over 20 years.

The impact of this health improvement amounts to a saving of £67m in direct NHS and social care costs and an incredible £548m in additional costs to the economy in 2035 alone.

If today's trends continue, around 15 per cent of people from the most deprived groups are predicted to smoke in 2035, compared to just 2.5 per cent from the wealthiest.

Huge progress has already been made in tackling smoking and there are a number of effective measures in place, including the introduction of smoke free workplaces and a law to bring in plain, standardised packaging.

But [smoking rates](#) in the UK do not come down on their own. Even if the UK maintains current trends in smoking, tobacco could continue to devastate lives for generations to come.

Professor Paul Lincoln, UK Health Forum chief executive, said: "This study highlights the huge burden that smoking places on our society, particularly on the poorest and least advantaged groups.

"Unless we reduce the demand on the NHS from preventable causes of disease like smoking, it will be difficult to continue to provide sustainable healthcare for everyone who needs it.

"We hope that by showing the clear benefits of this tobacco free

ambition, we can inform [tobacco control](#) policy in the UK and even worldwide."

This research is published ahead of the General Election, after which both organisations are calling on the new Government to introduce a new Tobacco Control Strategy. This will set out plans for tackling the harm from smoking for the next ten years, including ways to support the future sustainability of the NHS.

Alison Cox, Cancer Research UK's director of cancer prevention, said: "Bold and ambitious targets are needed to save the thousands of lives and millions of pounds of NHS money lost to tobacco.

"We want the next Government to share our ambition for the next generation of children to grow up 'tobacco-free'. This target should be at the heart of a new strategy to tackle smoking.

"Measures like sustained funding for Stop Smoking Services, mass media campaigns and increased tax on [tobacco](#) all have the potential to help smokers to stop, and create much-needed revenue to support programmes that will reduce the burden on our [health](#) service."

More information: Hunt, D., et al. Modelling the implications of reducing smoking prevalence: the public health and economic benefits of achieving a 'tobacco-free' *Tobacco Control*. [DOI: 10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2016-053507](#)

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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