

Plain Packaging Reduces the Appeal of Tobacco Products

Tobacco companies rely on tobacco pack design as a critical form of marketing. The companies exploit all elements of packaging, including the construction, outer film, tear tape, inner frame, pack inserts and onsets, branding information, and color scheme.¹

As part of a comprehensive set of tobacco control measures to reduce tobacco use rates, laws that mandate “plain” packaging for tobacco products are intended to reduce the attractiveness and appeal of tobacco products to consumers, increase the noticeability and effectiveness of health warning labels (HWLs), and reduce the ability of the tobacco product and its packaging to encouraging smoking and mislead consumers about its harms.

Plain (also known as standardized) packaging prohibits the use of brand colors, logos, and design elements on tobacco packaging. Instead, a standard background color, package dimensions, and material are required for all packages. Only the brand name can appear on the package, but it must be displayed in a standardized format, location, font style, and non-appealing color.²

Initial impact of plain packaging in Australia

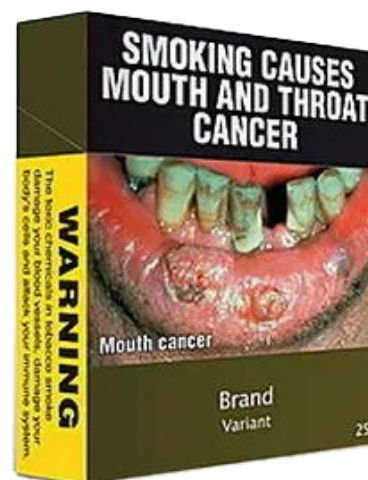
In December 2012, Australia was the first country in the world to implement plain packaging for tobacco products. Since the implementation of the law, research conducted in the country documented its impact:³

Plain packaging reduces the appeal of tobacco products

- One year following implementation of plain packaging, more cigarette smokers in Australia disliked their pack and had perceived lower pack appeal, lower cigarette quality, lower satisfaction, and lower value.⁴
- The majority of a large sample of adult smokers in the New South Wales, Australia reported a significant increase in strong negative perceptions about their packs in the months following implementation of plain packaging, including significant disagreement that the packs are attractive and fashionable, and that packs influence their choice of brand.⁵
- Among Australian adolescents who had seen packs in the previous six months, the appeal of cigarettes packs and cigarette brands decreased significantly following the introduction of plain packaging:
 - Compared with pre-implementation, adolescents reported higher levels of uncertainty regarding whether brands differed in their ease of being smoked and disagreement that some brands have better looking packs.⁶

Standardized or “Plain” Packaging of Tobacco requires that packaging has a uniform plain color and texture; mandates standard shape, size and materials of packs; and prohibits any branding, logos or other promotional elements on, inside or attached to the packaging or on individual products.

Only the brand name, product name, quantity of product and contact details may appear on packaging, in a standard typeface, together with other mandatory information such as health warnings and tax stamps.



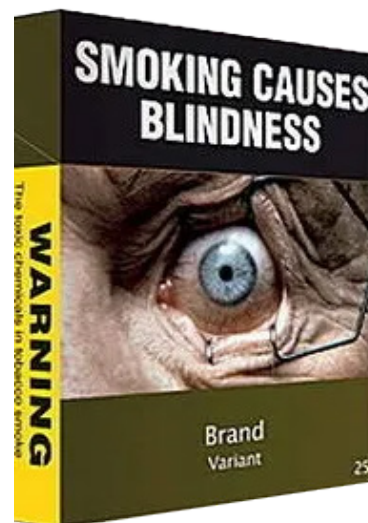
Plain cigarette packaging in Australia

Plain packaging increases the effectiveness of health warnings

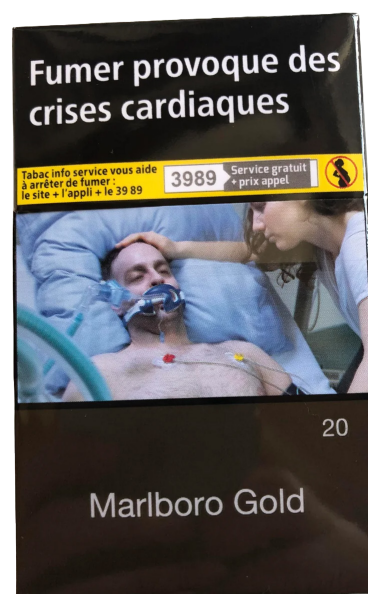
- A national study measuring Australian smokers' reactions to the HWLs on plain packs found that they focused on the larger HWLs and noticed them more than they did prior to implementation of the policy, and that the HWLs promoted thoughts about the risks of smoking; a reaction that relates to increased quit attempts.⁷
- A national survey of Australian smokers' responses one year after implementation found that more adult smokers noticed pictorial HWLs and attributed their motivation to quit to the warnings, avoided specific HWLs when purchasing cigarettes.⁴
- Smokers in New South Wales, Australia noticed HWLs more after the introduction of plain packs and said that the HWLs were having an impact:
 - Smokers were more likely to report worries about smoking and thoughts of quitting, seeing only the warnings on the packs, and feeling like they should hide their packs.
 - The plain packs also appeared to reverse a decline over time in the impact of the previous smaller warnings, with smokers' responses being comparable to those measured at the time HWLs first appeared on packs.⁵
- Among a large sample of Australian adult smokers:
 - Plain packaging with larger pictorial HWLs increased quit intentions, pack avoidance, smokers' stopping themselves from smoking, and quit attempts. It also increased levels of pack avoidance and stubbing out prematurely.⁸
 - Reduced appeal, increased effectiveness of pictorial HWLs, and greater perceived harm in response to plain packs also predicted subsequent changes in each of the above quitting-related thoughts and behaviors.⁹

Plain Packaging benefits public health: emerging evidence from other countries

More than a decade after Australia (2012) first implemented plain packaging, other countries have begun to follow suit. Some of these countries have extended plain packaging to emerging products as well.¹⁰



Plain cigarette packaging in Australia



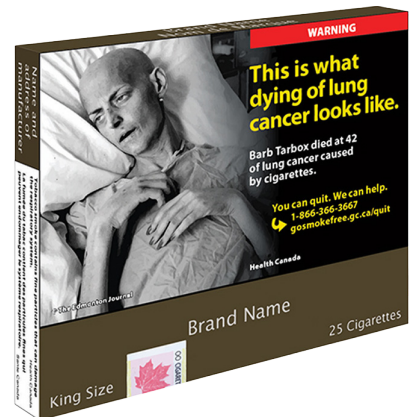
Plain cigarette packaging in France

Plain packaging decreases the appeal of tobacco and increases HWLs salience

Observational studies conducted in multiple countries, including Canada, France, New Zealand, Singapore and the United Kingdom, showed the effectiveness of the adoption of this policy.¹¹⁻¹⁵

A longitudinal survey suggests the benefit of introducing both stronger pictorial HWLs and plain packaging at the same time:

- A 2020 longitudinal survey conducted in Europe, compared how smokers in seven European countries responded after the adoption of new, large pictorial HWLs on the packs, with England also requiring plain packaging. The decrease in appeal and the increase in warning salience were greater in England than in the other six countries.¹⁶



Plain cigarette packaging in Canada

Plain packaging increases quit attempts among smokers and can help deter youth from starting to smoke

- A 2023 longitudinal study in the UK found that increased warning salience (noticing HWLs) encouraged plans to quit and quit attempts among cigarette smokers aged 16 and older.¹⁷
- A 2018 systematic review found that exposure to plain packaging increases intention to quit and increases negative attitudes to both smoking and starting smoking.¹⁸
- A 2024 study in Singapore found that the policy was associated with positive quit-related outcomes, reduced tobacco product appeal, and increased effectiveness of graphic health warnings.¹⁹
- A 2018 study found that a year after the implementation of plain packaging, smoking initiation among French adolescents aged 12-17 significantly decreased.¹⁵



Plain cigarette packaging in the UK

Key Takeaways

- Tobacco companies use tobacco packaging as a critical form of product marketing.
- Standardized or “plain” packaging reduces the attractiveness and appeal of tobacco products and increases the noticeability and effectiveness of health warnings.
- Plain packaging encourages cessation among current adult smokers and may deter initiation among adolescents.
- Guidelines for Articles 11 and 13 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control recommend that Parties consider adopting plain packaging to eliminate advertising or promotion, including design features that make products attractive.

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