

Ending appreciable tobacco use in a nation: Using a sinking lid on supply

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Abstract

We discuss some of the practical and ethical questions that may arise for a jurisdiction where a sinking lid end game strategy for tobacco supply is implemented. Such a strategy would involve regular required reductions in the amount of tobacco released to the market for sale, sufficient to achieve the desired level of commercial sales by a target date. Tobacco manufacturers would periodically bid to the government for a residual quota. Prices would increase as supply reduced. The price level would be influenced by demand, which in turn would reflect the impact of other interventions to reduce demand and the changing normality of smoking.

Higher priced tobacco could result in increased smuggling, theft, illegal sales and short-to-medium-term aggravation of some social inequalities. We suggest that the strategy be introduced in conjunction with a range of complementary interventions that would help reduce demand, and thus help ensure that the possible adverse effects are minimised. These complementary interventions include: providing comprehensive best practice smoking cessation support, better information to smokers and the public, strengthened regulation of tobacco retailing and supply, further controlling the pack and product design, measures to restrict supplies that bypass the increases in product price, strengthened enforcement and combating industry attacks. General prerequisites for a sinking lid strategy include public support for the goal of a tobacco-free society, and strong political leadership. The likely context for initial success in jurisdictions includes geographical isolation and/or strong border controls, absence of significant tobacco production and/or manufacturing and low government corruption.

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