

# Increased smoker recognition of a national quitline number following introduction of improved pack warnings: ITC Project New Zealand

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** We examined how recognition of a national quitline number changed after new health warnings were required on tobacco packaging in New Zealand (NZ).

**Methods:** The NZ arm of the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Survey (ITC Project) is a cohort study that surveyed smokers in two waves ( $N = 1,376$  and  $N = 923$ ). Wave 1 respondents were exposed to text-based warnings with a quitline number but no wording to indicate that it was the "Quitline" number. Wave 2 respondents were exposed to pictorial health warnings (PHWs) that included the word "Quitline" beside the number as well as a cessation message featuring the Quitline number and repeating the word "Quitline."

**Results:** The introduction of the new PHWs was associated with a 24 absolute percentage point between-wave increase in Quitline number recognition (from 37% to 61%,  $p < .001$ ). Recognition increased from a minority of respondents to a majority for all age groups, genders, deprivation levels (using small area and individual measures), financial stress (two measures), and ethnic groups (e.g., the level for Maori in Wave 2: 62%, Pacific peoples: 61%, and European/other: 62%). There was also an equalizing effect on previous differences in Quitline recognition by gender, ethnic group, and for both deprivation measures.

**Discussion:** This study provides some evidence for the value of clearly identifying quitline numbers on tobacco packaging as part of PHWs. While this finding is consistent with previously published studies, the finding that this intervention appeared to benefit all sociodemographic groups is novel.

## Recommended Citation:

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