

Australian smokers support stronger regulatory controls on tobacco: findings from the ITC Four-Country Survey

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Abstract

Objective: To examine Australian smokers' attitudes towards regulation of the tobacco industry and to compare their attitudes with those of three similar countries – the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US), and Canada

Method: A telephone survey of 2,056 adult Australian smokers and 6,166 Canadian, US, and UK smokers was conducted in 2004 as the third wave of the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Four- Country Survey.

Results: Australian smokers display the strongest support for regulation. Only 16% believe that tobacco companies should be allowed to advertise/promote cigarettes as they please, 70% agree that tobacco products should be more tightly regulated, and 64% agree that governments should do more to tackle the harms of smoking.

Smokers see government failure to do so in cynical terms – 77% agree that governments do not really care about smoking because of money from tobacco taxes. Opposition comes largely from smokers who hold self-exempting beliefs about smoking's risks, have a positive attitude to smoking, do not accept that smoking is socially denormalised, and do not hold tobacco companies responsible for harms caused by smoking.

Conclusions and Implications: The majority of Australian smokers believe that the tobacco industry is partly responsible for the predicament they find themselves in and want governments to act more strongly in their real interests. The strong relationship between support for regulation and cynicism about government inaction should stimulate governments into action.

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