

The Public Health Association

MEDIA RELEASE

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For immediate release

Tobacco tax rises must be well signalled

The Public Health Association (PHA) welcomes new legislation passed last night stepping rises in tobacco excise tax over the next two years.

The PHA called for significant tax increases in its recent submission to the Māori Affairs Select Committee's inquiry into the impact of smoking on Māori, and PHA National Executive Officer, Dr Gay Keating says the legislation is a positive step for smokefree initiatives in New Zealand.

"We know most smokers say they want to give up smoking," Dr Keating said.

"Even though the increase will have some impact on low-income smokers, many smokers support tax increases as a motivator."

However, Dr Keating said it would have been better if the tax increases had been well publicised, rather than sprung on smokers by surprise.

"Some foreknowledge would have given many smokers the psychological impetus to make a staunch attempt to quit. An 'out-of-the-blue' increase like this leaves them no room to attempt to give up in advance of the price hike. Low income smokers will now face a struggle between their addiction and having to pay more for tobacco."

The PHA says that Tariana Turia deserves congratulations for championing this move.

"We agree with Minister Turia's view that while the increases announced are lower than ideal, it is a good start. Continued tax increases will send a strong signal," Dr Keating said.

The PHA also welcomes the long overdue move to harmonise taxes on loose tobacco and cigarettes, but Dr Keating says the excise tax should not just go into government coffers.

"The extra tax should be dedicated to more cessation services, and social marketing to further encourage quit attempts," she says.

"We know most New Zealand smokers are happier about price rises if the extra money is spent on services helping smokers quit. It would also allow government to fund new initiatives without taking money from existing smokefree services."

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