

Advances in Tobacco Control Heralded by NCD Advocates

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The NCD Alliance joined other advocates for public health in welcoming the news about measureable gains in tobacco control announced in The WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic released on 7 July in Montevideo, Uruguay.

“The report provides evidence of the impact of global efforts to address the pandemic of tobacco-related diseases,” said Dr Nils E Billo, Executive Director of the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease, one of the principal partners in the Alliance.

“Since 2008, tobacco control measures have been put in place that protect 1.1 billion more people, and this will ultimately have a major impact on public health.” Tobacco use is a leading risk factor for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) including heart disease, cancer and chronic respiratory disease, and the NCD Alliance strongly supports improved tobacco control.

According to WHO, 55% of the world’s population is now covered by at least one of the WHO’s MPOWER suite of six effective anti-tobacco policies:

Monitor tobacco use and prevention policies,

Protect people from tobacco smoke,

Offer help to quit tobacco use,

Warn about the dangers of tobacco,

Enforce bans advertising, promotion and sponsorship and Raise taxes on tobacco.

WHO found that the greatest gains were made in warning people about the dangers of tobacco use. More than one billion people in 19 countries are covered by laws requiring large, graphic health warnings on packages of tobacco, up from 547 million people in 16 countries in 2008.

Other key findings from The WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic include: • 739 million people protected by national smoke-free legislation, up from 353 million in 2008, with much of the gain happening in low- and middle-income countries.

- 210 million people protected by smoke-free legislation at the sub-national level, a gain of 100 million since 2008.
- An additional 115 million people living in countries with the recommended minimum tobacco tax levels, and 26 countries and one territory with taxes constituting the recommended minimum of 75 percent of retail price.
- 59 countries representing 3.2 billion people monitoring the tobacco epidemic using best practice methods up from 36 countries in 2008. “While these gains are substantive, there is still much to be done,” said Dr Billo. “For example, financial commitment to tobacco control measures is still relatively low in comparison with the amount of monies governments have collected from tobacco excise tax: US \$133 billion compared to only US \$1 billion spent on tobacco control, especially in low- and middle- income countries.”

Low- and middle-income countries are the target of aggressive tobacco industry tactics as they seek to build new markets. These countries are also seeing sharp increases in non-communicable diseases, which were formerly associated with high-income countries. Of the 36 million people who died from NCDs in 2008, WHO reported that approximately 80% were from low- and middle-income countries.

The WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic is available for download at www.who.int/tobacco [1].

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[1] <http://www.who.int/tobacco>