

MEDIA RELEASE

Immediate Release

Australians agree there are too many shops selling tobacco in Australia — and they want governments to lift the bar

Australians believe tobacco is far too easy to access and want governments to significantly lift the bar on who can sell it, as the national concern on illicit tobacco continues to grow.

Four leading health organisations — the Australian Council on Smoking and Health (ACOSH), the Public Health Association of Australia, Cancer Council and Quit — have joined forces to release new national survey findings showing strong public support for tighter controls on tobacco retailing.

The nationally representative survey¹, conducted by the Cancer Council's Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer, of 5,036 Australian adults reveals a clear mandate for reform -- not only to tackle illicit tobacco, but to address the sheer oversupply of tobacco retailers across the country.

Overall, the Australian public's perception that there are too many shops selling tobacco was widespread (64%) and most respondents (75%) believed it is very easy or easy for Australians who smoke to buy illegal tobacco products right now.

It comes as Assistant Minister for Citizenship, Customs and Multicultural Affairs, The Hon Julian Hill, speaking at this week's National Illicit Tobacco and E-cigarette Symposium, raised serious questions about why tobacco continues to be sold in more than 40,000 outlets despite only around 8% of Australians smoking daily.

ACOSH CEO Laura Hunter said the scale of tobacco retailing in Australia is out of step with both public health goals and community expectations.

"Minister Hill has asked the right question — why is tobacco so widely available in Australia and why is it so easy to get a license to sell such a deadly product?" Ms Hunter said.

"To put it in perspective, around 70% of Australians rely on petrol, yet we have only about 7,000 petrol stations across the country. Everyone relies on supermarkets, and there are only around 9,500 of them nationwide".

But tobacco — a product that is deadly when used as intended and used daily by only a small proportion of the population — is sold in over 40,000 outlets.

"That's not just excessive. It creates a system that is incredibly difficult to regulate and easy to exploit."

"This survey shows the community agrees, Australians think there are simply too many stores selling tobacco in our communities."

The survey also shows overwhelming support for stronger regulation of tobacco retailers, including support for more stringent rules about who can have a Tobacco Licence.



- 82% support requiring retailers to prove they can keep staff safe and store products securely
- 80% support mandatory staff training and responsible management practices
- 77% support strict record-keeping requirements
- 73% support preventing anyone with criminal associations from holding a licence

“There is a gross oversupply of tobacco in Australia, and the public agree the bar needs to lift for tobacco licensing,” Ms Hunter said.

“When tobacco is sold on every corner, it makes enforcement harder and it normalises a deadly product, making it harder to quit and easier to take up smoking.”

“Forty thousand outlets is an open invitation for illegal operators to exploit the system.”

Chair of Cancer Council’s National Tobacco Issues Committee, Alecia Brooks said Australians want to see tighter controls on the illicit tobacco trade, which they are witnessing the consequences of throughout the country every day.

“Standards need to be raised to protect our communities, who are increasingly concerned about the oversupply of tobacco retailers.”

Brooks also noted ongoing commitment from federal, state and territory governments is crucial to tighten controls, mandate for reform, and to quickly address the oversupply of tobacco retailers.

“It needs to be harder for legal and criminal suppliers to exploit communities. The health of Australians needs to come first, with smoking known to cause at least 16 types of cancer, including cancer of the lungs, mouth, liver, bladder, bowels, kidneys and other organs.”

A state-by-state comparison is coming

The survey marks the beginning of a broader push for reform, and a shared opportunity for all governments to strengthen their efforts.

ACOSH will soon release a national comparison highlighting how each state and territory is progressing in tackling illicit tobacco and strengthening retail licensing systems — with the aim of recognising leadership, sharing best practice, and encouraging continued improvement across the board.

“There is a strong and growing commitment among states, territories and the federal government to work together,” Ms Hunter said. “Australians want to see that momentum continue — with stronger licensing, more effective enforcement, and fewer places selling tobacco.”

“A product that kills two in three long-term users should not be so readily accessible in our communities.”

ENDS



1. Participants were recruited from the Social Research Centre's probability-based panel Life in Australia™. Data were weighted to minimise selection bias and meet population benchmarks.

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