



Unmasking Big Tobacco: An Open Letter to Australians

Dear Australians,

As World No Tobacco Day approaches, we write as a coalition of health organisations to highlight one of Australia's greatest public health successes— and the growing threat to its future.

Australia has achieved some of the lowest smoking rates in the world thanks to strong, evidence based, tobacco control policies that have saved thousands of lives. But this progress is now at risk.

In 2026, the tobacco industry is working to regain influence over public health policy. At a recent federal parliamentary inquiry into illicit tobacco, a major global tobacco company was granted a private, undisclosed hearing during these important public proceedings. No public listing. No transparency. No scrutiny.

This is deeply concerning. Giving a tobacco giant this platform undermines Australia's obligations under the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which is designed to protect policymaking from tobacco industry interference. These safeguards exist for a reason— tobacco company profits depend on products that still kill 66 Australians every day.

The industry is now using the rise of illicit tobacco to reshape public debate and to push for lower taxes. But illicit tobacco is primarily an enforcement and health issue— not a tax one. Even if we were to cut the tobacco tax altogether, illicit products would remain cheaper, while legal tobacco would become more affordable, tobacco industry profits would skyrocket and smoking rates would increase, undoing decades of progress.

We must remember that smoking remains Australia's leading cause of preventable death, responsible for 24,000 deaths each year, with nearly one in five cancer deaths still attributed to tobacco use. Australia's success in tobacco control is real, but it is also fragile. It relies on continued vigilance and a firm commitment to evidence based policy, free from industry influence. To stay on track, we must:

- Enforce strict transparency and uphold protections against tobacco industry interference;
- Maintain proven policies, including tobacco taxation, advertising restrictions, and public education campaigns;
- Strengthen action on illicit tobacco through enforcement and by assisting people to quit smoking altogether, not by lowering prices, increasing affordability and increasing tobacco industry profits;
- Expose industry tactics and hold decision makers accountable.

As World No Tobacco Day on 31 May calls on us to *Unmask the Appeal*, we urge Australians and policymakers to *Unmask Big Tobacco* and question who really benefits from tobacco tax cuts and other efforts to weaken tobacco control measures. If you share our concerns, send this letter to your local MP.



Supported by

Jacinta Reddan

CEO, Cancer Council Australia

Todd Harper AM

CEO, Cancer Council VIC

Verity Hawkins

CEO, Cancer Council ACT

Tanya Izod

CEO, Cancer Council NT

Alison Lai

CEO, Cancer Council TAS

Professor Sarah Hosking

CEO, Cancer Council NSW

Ashley Reid

CEO, Cancer Council WA

Adjunct Associate Professor Matt Gardiner

CEO, Council Council QLD

Kerry Rowlands

CEO, Cancer Council SA

Laura Hunter

CEO, Australian Council on Smoking and Health

Vincent G.W. So

CEO, Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand

Rachael Andersen

Director, Quit

Nadia Mastersson

Head, The Australian Prevention Partnership Centre, Sax Institute, Adjunct Associate Professor, School of Medicine and Public Health, University of Newcastle

Emeritus Professor Mike Daube AO

CitWA Hon DSci FPHAA FFPH
Faculty of Health Sciences, Curtin University

Hayley Jones

Director, McCabe Centre for Law & Cancer

Professor Sarah Durkin

Director, Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer, Behavioural Science Division, Cancer Council Victoria

Mark Brooke

CEO, Lung Foundation Australia

Professor Michelle Jongenelis

BSc (Honours) | MPsych (Clinical) | PhD
Director, Melbourne Centre for Behaviour Change,
The University of Melbourne

Professor Becky Freeman

Prevention Research Collaboration,
School of Public Health, Faculty of Medicine and
Health, The University of Sydney

Distinguished Professor Emily Banks AM

Professor Coral Gartner

Director, NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence on
Achieving the Tobacco Endgame, School of Public
Health, The University of Queensland

Professor Marita Hefler

Flinders Nicotine & Tobacco Control Research Group,
Flinders University (Darwin)

Emeritus Professor Simon Chapman AO

PhD FASSA Hon FFPH (UK)

Professor Matthew Peters

Professor of Respiratory Medicine, Macquarie
Medical School, Macquarie University

Adjunct Professor Terry Slevin

CEO, Public Health Association of Australia

Kate Miranda

CEO, Asthma Australia

Associate Professor Raglan Maddox

Tobacco Free Program

Lisa Murphy

CEO, Stroke Foundation

Professor Sabe Sabesan

President, Clinical Oncology Society of Australia

Professor Lisa Wood

Institute for Health Research, University of Notre
Dame

For support to quit smoking or vaping, visit quit.org.au or call Quitline on 13 7848.