

Heart Foundations help (para)medical professionals to voice their opinions and exert influence on the discussion on tobacco packaging.

The Dutch Heart Foundation and the European Heart Network (EHN)* are pleading for the introduction of 'plain packaging', otherwise known as neutral packaging of tobacco products. The recently adopted European Tobacco Products Directive does not impose plain packaging, instead it leaves this to the discretion of the individual member states. The Dutch Heart Foundation and the EHN are therefore requesting (para)medical professionals in the field of cardiovascular diseases to support the introduction of plain packaging by signing a statement posted on www.hartstichting.nl/plainpackaging on or before May 31st 2014. The aim is to allow professionals – who deal with people suffering from cardiovascular diseases brought on by tobacco – to voice their opinions and exert influence on the political discussion about plain packaging.

Plain packaging

Plain packaging means that cigarette packages no longer show trade marks, brand specific colours and logos, but instead only display the brand name in a uniform font type in a fixed location and colour. Plain packaging also shows mandatory health warnings both in text and picture format.

Since the ban on tobacco commercials was introduced in most European countries, the tobacco industry has allocated enormous budgets to marketing and innovation of cigarette pack designs in order to have the packages appeal to targeted audiences. A smoker within the EU smokes on average 14 cigarettes per day. Each time the smoker takes a cigarette from the pack this offers brand exposure and marketing for tobacco products. As Marc Willemsen, Professor in Tobacco Control Research, puts it: '*Cigarette packages become miniature bill boards!*'.

Plain packaging would allow to fight this method of marketing. Plain packaging is an effective way to reduce the appeal of cigarettes - allowing smokers to quit smoking more easily - and to reduce the temptation for youth and young adults to start smoking.

Plain packaging in Australia

In 2012 legislation came into effect in Australia introducing mandatory plain packaging. That this measure is successful is shown by the steep increase in people calling the 'Quitline' since the introduction of plain packaging.

Smoking and cardiovascular diseases

Smoking is the most important avoidable risk factor with regard to cardiovascular disease. The effectiveness of encouraging people to quit smoking and preventing young people from starting to smoke increases substantially if smoking is denormalised and quitting is actively supported in society.

To what use will the statement be put?

Based on the country of origin, the digital signatures will be distributed to the respective members of EHN. The relevant organisations can subsequently use the signed statement, (highlighting the total amount of collected signatures), to put the discussion on plain packaging on the agenda or, alternatively, to further the ongoing discussion in their respective regions. In addition the statement can be used by EHN and its members during the election campaign of May 2014 to stimulate the new Euro Parliamentarians to fight against cardiovascular diseases and stroke and support our call for a healthy smoke-free society.

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The EHN is a network of 31 European heart foundations - amongst which is the Dutch Heart Foundation - and other health organisations in 24 countries. The European Heart Network plays a leading role in the prevention and reduction of cardiovascular diseases, in particular heart disease and stroke, through advocacy, networking, capacity-building and patient support, so that they are no longer a major cause of premature death and disability throughout Europe.

Note for editors:

For more information, please contact the spokesperson of the Dutch Heart Foundation: Thérèse Dulfer (+31 6 46 30 72 94) or Frederique Hermie (+31 6 46 28 26 89), or via pers@hartstichting.nl

Please visit the website below for an article written by Prof. Marc Willemsen containing further information on plain packaging and references to research: www.hartstichting.nl/plainpackaging under 'downloads'.