

Health Warning Labels

Larger Health Warning Labels are More Effective

Article 11 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control states that health warning labels (HWLs) should cover at least 50% of the principal display areas of the tobacco package, but at a minimum must cover at least 30%.

Article 11 Guidelines recommend that Parties consider HWLs that are larger than 50%, stating “Given the evidence that the effectiveness of health warnings and messages increases with their size, Parties should consider using health warnings and messages that cover more than 50% of the principal display areas and aim to cover as much of the principal display areas as possible.”

Larger health warnings are more noticeable and promote smoking cessation behavior

Experimental studies conducted in several countries have shown that larger HWLs have a greater impact on smokers.

- The New Zealand Ministry of Health commissioned a study to examine consumer opinion on HWLs and their potential to positively impact smoking behavior. The large HWL (50% of the front) was overwhelmingly preferred to the smaller HWL (30% of the front). Consumer preferences were attributed to the prominence of the larger pictorial HWL and the visibility of the graphic HWL on the front of the pack even when the pack is opened.³
- Smokers who participated in 56 focus groups conducted across seven countries in the European Union generally preferred larger HWLs because of their greater prominence. One representative comment from a participant observed, “The bigger it is, the better we see the warnings.”⁴

As more countries implement larger HWLs, growing evidence shows that larger HWLs are more effective than smaller HWLs.

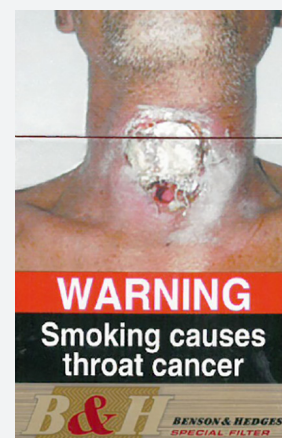
- A Canadian study conducted after Canada strengthened its HWLs by moving from 25% text-only HWLs to 50% pictorial HWLs in 2001, showed that both current and former smokers thought that the new labels were more effective than previous labels in discouraging people from starting to smoke, motivating people to quit, motivating former smokers to refrain from smoking again, and causing people to worry about the health effects of smoking.⁵
- A major multi-country study that compared HWLs in four high-income countries (Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States), found that larger, more comprehensive HWLs were more likely to be noticed and rated as effective by smokers.^{6,7}
- In 2010, Uruguay increased pictorial HWLs from covering 50% to 80% of the front and back of tobacco packaging. A survey of smokers in Uruguay found that the larger images were more effective than the smaller images. The larger labels were more noticeable, caused smokers to think more about health harms, increased thoughts about quitting and caused smokers to forgo smoking a cigarette more than the smaller labels.⁸

LARGER HEALTH WARNING LABELS

- Are more noticeable to youth and smokers, forcing them to pay attention to the warning and think about its message.
- More effectively communicate and increase knowledge about the risks of tobacco use and influence plans to quit smoking.
- Decrease the amount of space available for the tobacco industry to market its product.^{1,2}



Size: 90%
(Nepal, 2016)



Size: 85%
(India, 2016)

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- A study assessing the effects of Australia’s new HWLs and plain packaging for tobacco products adopted in December 2012, found that the new pictorial HWLs on plain packages (75% of the front and 90% of the back), were better at stimulating thoughts about the health risks than the previous pictorial HWLs on branded packs (30% of the front and 90% of the back). This cognitive reaction suggests that the increase in HWL size will have positive behavioral effects.⁹

Countries that approved pictorial HWLs of at least 75% of the principal display areas of the pack

Country (year of approval)	Average (%)	Front (%)	Back (%)
Nepal (2014)	90	90	90
Vanuatu (2016)	90	90	90
New Zealand (2017)	87.5	75	100
India (2015)	85	85	85
Thailand (2013)	85	85	85
Pakistan (2015)	85	85	85
Australia (2012)	82.5	75	90
Sri Lanka (2015)	80	80	80
Uruguay (2010)	80	80	80
Brunei Darussalam (2012)	75	75	75
Canada (2012)	75	75	75
Lao PDR (2016)	75	75	75
Myanmar (2016)	75	75	75
Gambia (2016)	75	75	75

Key Messages

- Large pictorial health warning labels are more effective than smaller health warning labels.
- Large pictorial health warnings help to persuade smokers to quit, keeping former smokers from starting again, and never-smokers from starting.
- Countries should require that pictorial HWLs occupy as much of area on tobacco product packaging as possible, in accordance with Article 11 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

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- If a border is required, the space dedicated to the frame should be added to the total percentage of space occupied by the warning and not included within it.
- Countries should consider requiring a minimum size for health warnings, including minimum width and minimum height. This is especially important for tobacco products packages that are small.



Size: 80% (Uruguay, 2012)



Size: 75% (Canada, 2012)

References

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