

# A REVIEW OF KEY LEARNINGS FROM CANADA'S CIGARETTE PACKAGE WARNINGS

Cynthia Callard, Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada

**P**icture-based cigarette warnings first appeared in Canada in late 2000. Since then:

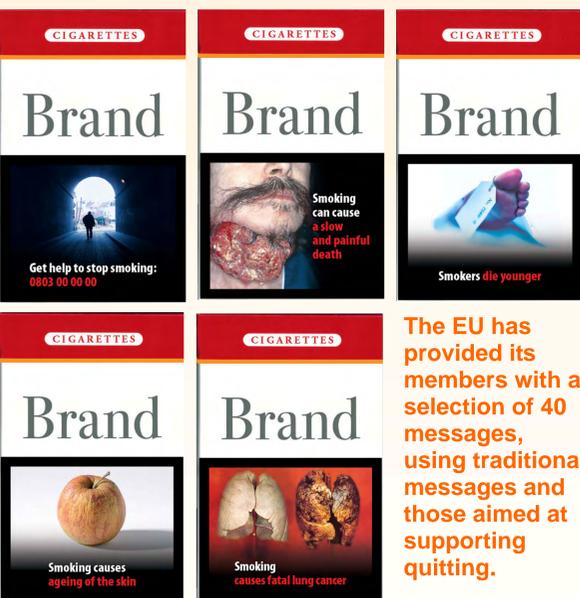
- ◆ 2 countries have implemented similar warnings (Brazil and Singapore).
- ◆ 2 countries have passed laws which will soon require similar warnings (Thailand's come into force in February 2005 and Australia's in March 2006)
- ◆ The European Union has set the option for its 25 member countries to adopt picture-based warnings
- ◆ Canada is now preparing a second round of picture-based warning labels (Brazil is already on its second round).



**In Canada, Tobacco companies must place one of the above warnings on 50% of both sides of each package of cigarettes (one side in English, one side in French). Additional health information messages are printed on the inside of the package. Health Canada is now reviewing proposals for new health warning labels.**



**Brazil's 10 new tobacco messages (above) must appear on 100% of either the front or the back of the package.**



**The EU has provided its members with a selection of 40 messages, using traditional messages and those aimed at supporting quitting.**

**Australia's new health warnings will appear in 2006. They must cover 30% of the front and 90% of the back of the package (a combined 60%). They are the largest legislated warnings in the world.**

**Seven of the 14 new warnings are shown.**



## The evidence suggests:

**Cigarette warnings are a uniquely effective health measure:**

- ◆ They are delivered directly to their target audience
- ◆ Each smoker receives a repeated and reinforced message about 6,000 times each year
- ◆ They outperform mass media messages for recall and credibility
- ◆ The costs of printing and distribution is borne (as it should be) by the tobacco companies.

**Size and pictures make a difference**

Four principles to effective cigarette warnings:

- ◆ Colour picture or graphics
- ◆ Positioning on the front of packs
- ◆ Increase in size
- ◆ Direct and unambiguous messages

**Health warning messages work best when:**

- ◆ they improve smokers' understanding of both the severity and the likelihood of disease.

- ◆ they present information in a way that is personal and salient to the smokers' experience
- ◆ they motivate the smoker to take health protective behaviours.

**Pictures work well.**

- ◆ Fear messages can be highly effective when they are combined with efficacy messages. Smokers who reported negative reactions in response to the new Canadian health warning messages were **more likely** to have tried quitting or to report that they were **more likely** to quit.

**Cognitive process is the key to impact.**

Smokers must notice the information, think about it and mentally organize it, and relate it to their pre-existing knowledge. This happens best when:

- ◆ the warnings provide specific, unambiguous information, with an expanded explanation (not a general message like "smoking is harmful.")
- ◆ The information is presented in a way that evokes an emotional response
- ◆ The warnings are vivid.

**Fears that the warnings would back-fire were unfounded.**

There is little evidence of any adverse outcomes from these warning.

- ◆ They don't cause unnecessary emotional distress to smokers
- ◆ Smokers don't avoid them (they don't cover them up)
- ◆ With pictures, more smokers want more information

**Some smokers benefit less**

Smokers who are not able to process the information in the warning (especially low-literacy smokers) receive less benefit from these warnings. Low-Literacy smokers tend to scan, but not read, the messages, and to assign their own general meaning to the pictures (i.e. "smoking is harmful") because the pictures illustrate the text but do not independently convey the message.

These smokers might benefit from messages that use other learning styles (like experiential learning): testimonials or value-based messages might work better for them.

## Greater potential

**Future warning requirements can build on experience by:**

- ◆ **Appealing to social norms**  
Focusing on negative social consequences (not just health risks) may be more effective among groups like youth.
- ◆ **Encouraging smokers to talk to others**  
Labels can be used to prompt smokers to talk about their addiction (talking is known to increase quitting)
- ◆ **Increasing confidence in quitting**  
People are more likely to try to quit if they believe they can succeed—labels can reinforce self-efficacy.
- ◆ **Integrating messages with other public health measures**  
Cigarette messages can strategically communicate messages to support policy change (like smoking bans) or reinforce other campaigns (like Quit and Win).
- ◆ **Communicating values**  
Smokers' dissonance can be increased by messages that remind them of the inconsistency between their behaviour and their beliefs.

## References

National Agency for Sanitary Surveillance (ANVISA) (2003). *Resolução - RDC nº 335*. Government of Brazil.

Creatic + Market Report. (2003). *Effectiveness of Health Warning Messages on Cigarette Packages in Informing Less-literate Smokers*. Health Canada

Environics Research Group Ltd., (2001). *Evaluation of New Warnings on Cigarette Packages*. Prepared for Canadian Cancer Society, Focus Canada 2001-3.

Environics Research Group Limited (2000). *Health Warning Messages on the Flip/Slide and Inserts of Cigarette Packaging - A Survey of Smokers*. Ottawa: Health Canada.

Environics Research Group Limited (2003a). *Toxics Information on Cigarette Packaging: Results of a Survey of Smokers*. Ottawa: Health Canada.

Environics Research Group Limited (2004a). *Wave 8 Surveys: The Health Effects of Tobacco and Smoking Cessation: A Longitudinal Survey of a Survey of Smokers*. Ottawa: Health Canada.

Environics Research Group Limited (2004b). *Wave 8 Surveys: The Health Effects of Tobacco and Smoking Cessation: Evidence from former smokers*. Can J Public Health. 2004 May-Jun;95(3):201-4

Environics Research Group Limited (2004b). *Wave 8 Surveys: The Health Effects of Tobacco and Smoking Cessation: Evidence from former smokers*. Can J Public Health. 2004 May-Jun;95(3):201-4

European Union. *EU fight against tobacco continues with graphic picture warnings and € 72 million media campaign*. October 22, 2004

Fong, Geoffrey T. (2001) *A review of the research on tobacco warning labels with particular emphasis on the new Canadian warning labels*. Expert report submitted to Justice Canada in JTI\_Macdonald and Imperial Tobacco Canada nd Rothmans, Benson & Hedges v. The Attorney General of Canada

Hammond, D. et al. (2003). "Impact of the Graphic Canadian Warning Labels on Adult Smoking Behaviour." *Tobacco Control*, 12: 391-395.

Hammond, David (2002). *Cigarette warning labels and smoking cessation: A longitudinal survey of adult smokers in the Waterloo Region*. Thesis. Waterloo University

Hammond D, McDonald PW, Fong GT, Brown KS, Cameron R. (2004). *The impact of cigarette warning labels and smoke-free bylaws on smoking cessation: evidence from former smokers*. Can J Public Health. 2004 May-Jun;95(3):201-4

Hammond D, Fong GT, McDonald PW, Brown KS, Cameron R. (2004). *Graphic Canadian cigarette warning labels and adverse outcomes: evidence from Canadian smokers*. Am J Public Health. 2004 Aug;94(8):1442-5.

Health Canada (1999). *Proposed New Labelling Requirements for Tobacco Products - Consultation Paper*. Ottawa: Health Canada.

Health Canada (2000). *Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey*. (Access date: April 19, 2004).

Health Canada (2003a). *Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey*.

Health Canada (2004). "Building On Success: A Proposal for New Health-Related Information on Tobacco Product Labels".

Human Resources and Development Canada. (National Literacy Secretariat). (no date). *A Snapshot of Literacy in Canada: Update*. (Access date: April 19, 2004).

Kaiserman, MJ, Makomaski Illing, EM, Dasko, D. *Health Canada (2003). The Evaluation of Canada's Health Warning Messages: 18 Month Follow-Up*. Slide Presentation. Ottawa: Health Canada. (Access date: April 19, 2004).

Les Études de marché Créatec + (2003a). *Effectiveness of Health Warning Messages on Cigarette Packages in Informing Less-literate Smokers: Final Report*. Ottawa: Communication Canada.

Les Études de marché Créatec + (2003b). *Health Warning Messages on Smokeless Tobacco, Cigars and Pipe Products - A Qualitative Study with Consumers*. Ottawa: Health Canada.

Minister for Health and Ageing. Government of Australia. (February 2, 2004). *News Release*, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing. <http://www.health.gov.au/mediarel/y2004/tw/003.htm> (Access date: April 19, 2004).

National Health Surveillance Agency. Government of Brazil (October 28, 2003). News release <http://www.anvisa.gov.br/eng/informs/news/281003.htm>. (Access date: April 19, 2004).

Strahan, E.J. et al. (2002). "Enhancing the Effectiveness of Tobacco Package Warning Labels: A Social Psychological Perspective." *Tobacco Control*, 11: 183-190.