

## Background and Research Aims

### Background:

- In 2011, the New Zealand government announced a goal of becoming an essentially smokefree nation by 2025.
- To date, there is no clear strategy to realise this goal and the tobacco industry has exploited public uncertainty.

### Research Aims:

- To explore how smokers and non-smokers interpret the smoke-free 2025 goal.
- To suggest how misunderstandings might be clarified.

## Methods

### Sample:

- 748 respondents: 340 never-smokers, 62 former smokers, 70 occasional smokers, and 276 daily smokers.

### Instrument:

- Explored respondents' perceptions of the 2025 goal
- Collected demographic and smoking status information.

### Analysis:

- Data were reviewed using thematic analysis.

## Results

Despite supporting the 2025 goal, respondents' comments revealed misperceptions of the goal's meaning and implications:

### Be Fair! Recognise Wider Harms

- Respondents argued alcohol was more harmful than tobacco, believed the government could tackle only one priority at a time, and suggested focussing on alcohol:

*"The government should be concentrating on banning alcohol, even though I am a social drinker. It's the alcohol that kills people not only cigarettes; at least the smokers don't act all silly like the stupid drinkers that cannot handle their liquor."* (F, DS)

- **In fact, governments can address multiple priorities using research evidence to guide policy development.**

### Unintended Outcomes

- The goal would risk creating a black market:

*"history shows that when something becomes prohibited it creates a black market; it could have the potential to turn good law abiding citizens into criminals."* (F, DS)

- Participants feared negative consequences for tourism:

*"If sales are banned etc, we need to remain mindful of our tourist trade - don't want to scare off wealthy Chinese."* (M,NS)

- **In fact, illicit trade is unlikely, given New Zealand's strong border protection systems. The goal is consistent with New Zealand's "clean green" brand and likely to appeal to the majority of tourists who are non-smokers.**

### Freedom of Choice

- Some regarded the 2025 goal as a violation of individuals' choices, an argument widely used by the tobacco industry:

*"Smoking is like driving a car, or doing sport, or buying certain brands when shopping... it's a CHOICE! Choice is meant to be based on free will, which is something that even God doesn't mess round with."* (M, DS)

- **In fact, the goal neither bans smoking nor prohibits sales of tobacco. It will de-normalise smoking by making it less attractive and more expensive, and by making tobacco less visible and more difficult to consume in public areas.**

### Slippery Slope

- Some saw the 2025 goal as likely to lead to unwanted regulation and a society where individuals had fewer freedoms:

*"If smoking got banned what would be next,? It starts becoming a non free country."* (M, NS).

- **In fact, requiring policy to have a strong evidence base protects against unnecessary regulation and ensures only those measures where the likely benefits outweigh the likely harms are implemented.**

## Discussion and Conclusions

### Tobacco Industry Traction

- Confusion over "prohibiting" smoking, "banning" tobacco sales, and further restrictions reflect freedom of choice arguments featured in tobacco industry advertising.
- Beliefs illicit trade will increase also reflect tobacco industry scare-mongering.
- Widespread reference to alcohol suggests people regard public health problems as "either-or" choices.

### Public Health Responses

- Strong political leadership must refute industry arguments and reduce competition over whose "rights" take precedence.
- Denormalisation campaigns should expose the tobacco industry's self-interest, lack of evidence, and unscrupulous actions.
- Public health is positioned in opposition to smokers; new measures could displace the tobacco industry as smokers' ally by recognising smokers' regret, showing a united interest in cessation, and supporting cessation innovations.
- Widespread support for the 2025 goal exists, as does an expectation among non-smokers that further policy action will follow; failure to maintain this momentum will play into the tobacco industry's hands.