



Working for a tobacco-free Scotland

ASH Scotland response to Independent Budget Review - Initial Call for Contributions

April 2010

1. ASH Scotland welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Independent Budget Review's Initial call for contributions. ASH Scotland is an independent Scottish charity working in partnership to protect people from the harm caused by tobacco. ASH Scotland works towards a tobacco-free Scotland through our campaigning work; designing and delivering training; co-ordinating tobacco control alliances involving health professionals, local and national government representatives, campaigners and researchers; providing a free expert information service on tobacco and smoking used by both the general public and professionals; and working in low income areas and with youth groups. We strongly believe that ongoing investment in tobacco control will pay dividends for Scotland's health.
2. **The harm that smoking continues to cause in Scotland**
Although much progress has been made in reducing the prevalence of tobacco use in Scotland through concerted action from public services - the proportion of adults who smoke has reduced by half since the early 1970s (from 47% in 1972 to around 25% today¹) - the harm caused by tobacco remains at a staggering level. 13,500 deaths in Scotland each year, 24% of all deaths, are attributable to tobacco use². Men and women who die in middle age (35-69) lose on average 22 years of otherwise healthy life³, with cost to families and loved ones that is difficult to quantify. This burden of harm is disproportionately borne by the poorest in our society, as smoking prevalence is 45% in the most deprived areas compared with 11% in the least deprived⁴.
3. **The economic costs of smoking**
In addition to the well-documented deleterious health costs of both primary smoking⁵ and exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke⁶, smoking also carries significant economic cost. A report by the Scottish Public Health Observatory estimates the cost of smoking to the Scottish economy to be around £837 million annually through direct healthcare costs, productivity losses, and reduced consumer expenditure through premature death – equivalent to 1% of the total Scottish economic output in 2005⁷. Examining the costs to the NHS specifically, a recent research study published in the British Medical Journal's specialist publication, *Tobacco Control*, estimates the cost of smoking to the Scottish healthcare system to be in the region of £409 million annually⁸.

Although estimates for the economic costs of smoking vary depending on the methodology of modelling used, such estimates are consistently in the magnitude of hundreds of millions, giving observers confidence that smoking and tobacco use confers a large economic, and well as health and wellbeing burden. Although the relatively high taxation on tobacco brings in around £10 billion in revenue to the U.K. treasury annually⁹, a recent report estimates that, due to the large negative economic impact tobacco has (putting the cost of smoking to the UK society at large at £13.74 billion), *'each cigarette smoked is currently costing the country money'*¹⁰. Even if the net balance of taxation on tobacco products could be demonstrated to be revenue neutral or income generating in purely economic terms, the adverse impact that tobacco use has is antithetical to the Scottish Government's stated strategic objectives of creating a 'Wealthier and Fairer' and 'Healthier' Scotland¹¹, and its purpose target of increasing the healthy life

expectancy in Scotland between 2007 and 2017.

4. **Tobacco control interventions**

Measures to mitigate the harm caused by tobacco involve reducing the number of tobacco-users in Scotland through two principal routes: 1) encouraging existing smokers to give up and supporting them to do so; and 2) preventing the next generation of young people from becoming smokers.

5. **The benefits of smoking cessation**

Scotland has a publically funded national network of smoking cessation (stop-smoking) services available through NHS Scotland and free at the point of care. These services are available across the country and offer smokers who are ready to give up behavioural support from trained specialist advisors and pharmaceutical aids – an approach supported as the most effective by the most robust clinical and research evidence available¹². Smoking cessation activity in Scotland currently receives £11 million each year until 10/11¹³, with an additional £3 million for stop-smoking services delivered in pharmacies through the national pharmacy public health service, a method that research has shown to be more accessible to some smokers¹⁴. Through smoking cessation services, over 50,000 quit dates were set across the country in 2008 by Scots taking advantage of the service¹⁵.

Although smoking cessation services funded through the NHS have clear costs associated with them, as the harm and cost of continued smoking is so great, stop-smoking interventions are among the most cost-effective interventions available in preserving life when compared to other common screening and prevention interventions - even if an individual has smoked for many years¹⁶. In nearly all forms of stop smoking interventions, providing the intervention is cheaper than doing nothing.^{17,18}

It is notable that the voluntary sector has limited involvement in the provision of stop-smoking services or the encouragement of smokers to quit. It may be that, going forward, NHS stop-smoking services can achieve even greater value for money through partnership working.

6. **The benefits of smoking prevention**

It is estimated that 15,000 young people (aged 13-24) start smoking each year in Scotland¹⁹. As a proportion of these individuals will go on to become lifelong adult smokers, potentially developing smoking-related diseases with their associated health and economic costs, preventing this uptake from occurring is extremely important. This is recognised by the Scottish Government, and explicitly stated in the recommendations contained within *Scotland's future is smoke free: a smoking prevention action plan* published in 2008²⁰. As part of the actions contained within the plan, the Scottish Government committed to allocate £3 million in each year till 10/11 in order for NHS Health Boards and Scottish Councils to take forward various aspects of the plan, including enforcement of tobacco sales law, and the development of prevention initiatives aimed at young people.

The reasons why young people become smokers are complex²¹ with influencing factors operating at the individual (e.g. attitudes, self-esteem), personal environment (peers, family) and social environment (price, availability) levels. Given this complexity, interventions aimed to prevent young people from becoming smokers must be accordingly complex and multi-disciplinary (involving a range of public and voluntary sector services such as education, youth work, health promotion and enforcement). While some innovative approaches piloted with the 08/09 investment in smoking prevention are showing promise, sustained investment is necessary in order to build upon identified successes and continue the work. This is equally the case for public investment in the Enhanced Tobacco Sales Enforcement Programme²², in order to reduce the sale of tobacco products to young people.

The most recent tobacco control legislation in Scotland - the Tobacco and Primary Medical

Services (Scotland) Act²³ - contains provisions that are expected to come into force between 2011 – 2013, requiring Government funding for information campaigns to create awareness and ensure compliance with several aspects of the new legislation. Costs for this are estimated at around £750,000²⁴ to provide information to retailers and other stakeholders about the changes in the law, combined with the costs to set up a registration scheme for tobacco retailers. As with the importance of sustained funding to the enforcement programme, commitments to fund the necessary activity surrounding the implementation of the new Act should be honoured to avoid the costs that smoking will incur.

7. Conclusions

Smoking and tobacco use inflicts a significant health and economic cost to Scotland, disproportionately borne by the poorest members of society. As a result of this, tobacco use is in direct conflict with many of the national targets, objectives and outcomes set by the Scottish Government for the country.

Publically funded stop-smoking interventions through the NHS have been demonstrated to be both an effective and cost effective way of helping smokers quit, reducing the economic burden of tobacco use, and should continue to be prioritised in future public spending plans. Investment in prevention and enforcement must be sustained in order to build on the work that began with the smoking prevention action plan, and reap the future benefits of less young people becoming smokers. The voluntary sector has a role to play in adding value to both these aspects of tobacco control in difficult economic times, both in terms of delivery of discrete projects or initiatives and the central coordination of larger cross-sector work.

Difficult times for public sector funding will not diminish the tobacco industry's motivation to keep its customers using its products and to ensure it attracts new smokers to replace those who quit or die. It is important that future public spending plans recognise this, and prioritise effective, evidence-based tobacco control activity accordingly.

References

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