

2034 Target – ASH Scotland Viewpoint

June 2017



Achieving a tobacco-free Scotland by 2034 is largely about helping existing smokers in disadvantaged communities who want to stop

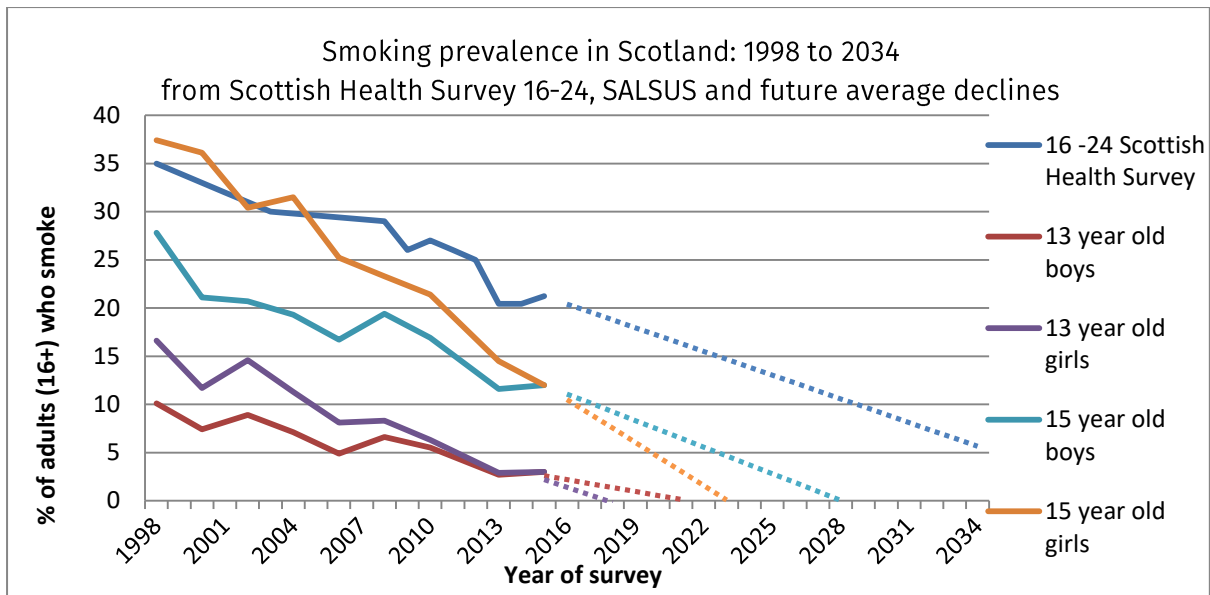
The Scottish Government has set a positive and ambitious target for Scotland to be “tobacco-free” by 2034. This is defined as an adult smoking rate of 5% or less and thus focuses on culture change, not prohibition. ASH Scotland has articulated the target as limiting smoking to the small number of informed adults who actively choose to do so – a positive, fair-minded and socially-inclusive vision we are very happy to support.

The target was announced in 2013 as part of a five-year tobacco strategy, “Creating a tobacco-free generation”. Noting that a child born that year will come of age at 21 in a tobacco-free Scotland nicely illustrates this positive aspiration for our children. Yet this emphasis on the next generation risks blinding us to the importance of engaging existing adult smokers in delivering the goal.

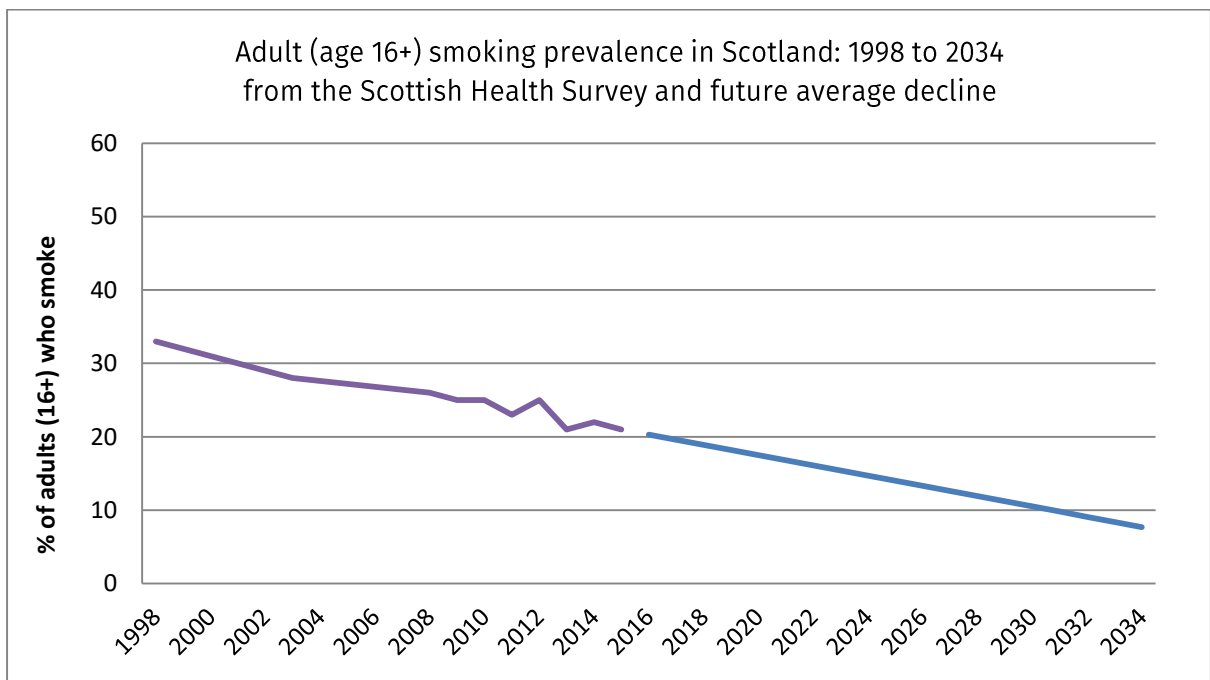
General trends in smoking in Scotland

To stimulate discussion we use some simple extrapolations to give a rough indication of current trends in smoking behaviour. We have checked that more detailed modelling (as yet unpublished) comes to similar conclusions to those below.

In the period since the Scottish Parliament was established, in 1999, there has been substantial progress in reducing smoking rates amongst 13 and 15-year olds, as determined by combining “regular” and “occasional” smokers in the SALSUS survey. In fact progress has been such that there are not enough youth smokers to continue this trend for much longer. The decrease in smoking amongst young adults, in the 16-24 age group, has been slower so remains of some concern.

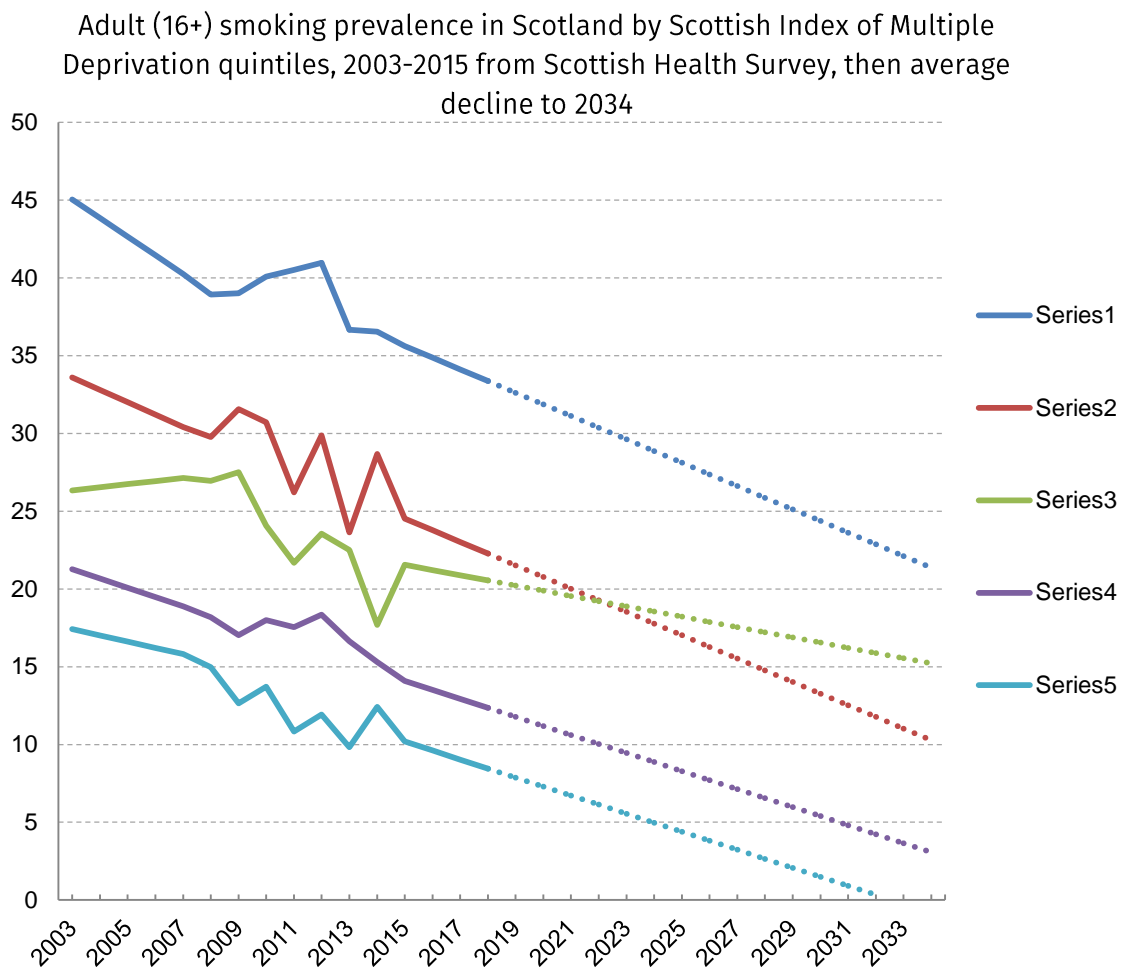


In the same period the adult smoking rate has declined at around 0.6% per year. Extrapolating that trend to 2034 comes reasonably close to the 5% figure, which could be taken to suggest that we can just continue as we are in order to achieve the 2034 target. However this assumes that the proportion of the smoking population who quit each year increases over time, and we should be clear that meeting the 2034 target is reliant upon this increase in quit rates.

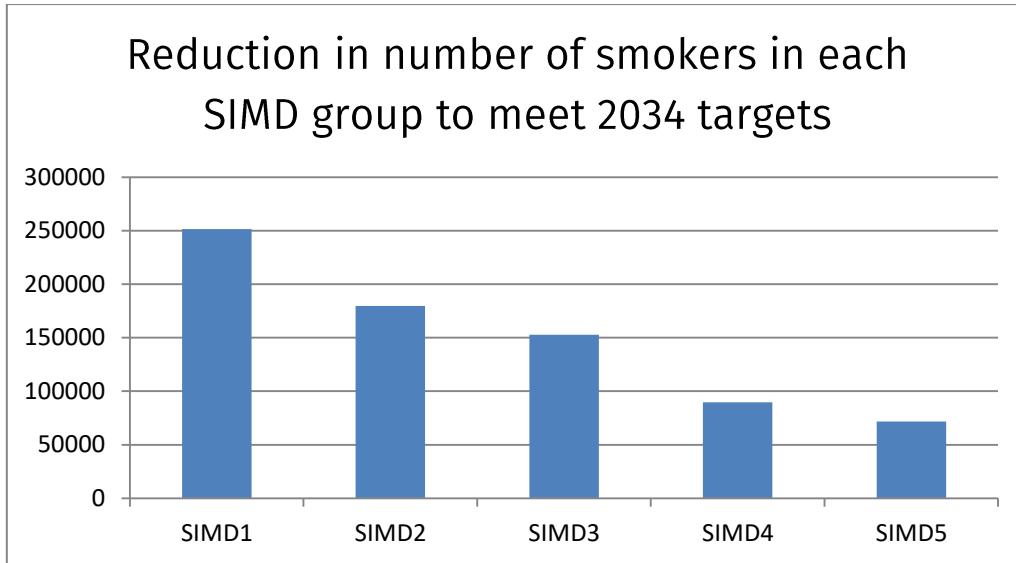


Smoking and inequality

We have long been aware that smoking rates are higher in disadvantaged communities. The rate of decline in smoking is roughly the same across SIMD (Social Index of Multiple Deprivation) groups, so that action to reduce smoking is helping people across society. Nevertheless the long term trend clearly indicates that smoking becomes increasingly concentrated in disadvantaged communities, and we will not meet the 2034 target unless we see faster change in disadvantaged groups.

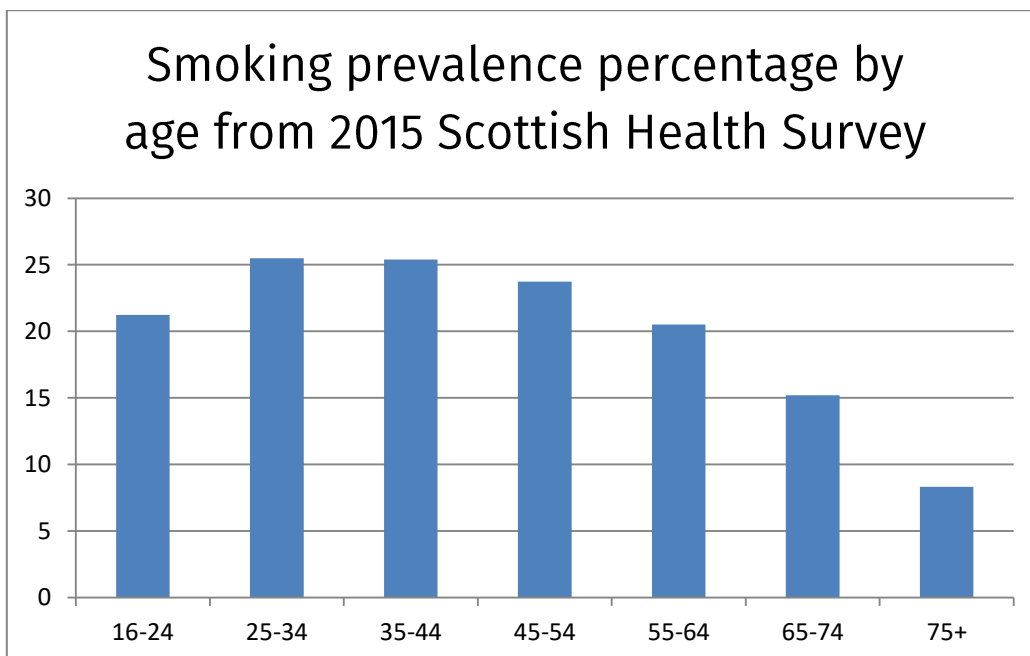


Calculating the required reduction from today's actual number of smokers further illustrates who we need to engage to deliver on the 2034 target (which ranges from 7% in SIMD 1 to 3% in SIMD 5). At the moment each of these columns is declining at roughly the same rate.



The age profile of current smokers

One final way to explore our route to the 2034 target is to look at the current smoking prevalence by age. With 2034 being just 17 years away, most of the people currently in the peak smoking years of the 20s, 30s and 40s will still be around. From this we can see that while the 2034 target is often framed in terms of the next generation, it will stand or fall on whether existing adult smokers continue to smoke. Having the next generation grow up free from tobacco is an important goal, but it is quite separate to delivering on the 2034 target.



Conclusion

The largest part of achieving a 5% smoking rate by 2034 lies in increasing quit rates amongst existing adult smokers in disadvantaged communities. While it is important to raise the next generation free from tobacco, this is too slow a process to deliver a 5% smoking rate in 17 years' time.

Increasing quit rates is compatible with culture shift, rather than prohibition, because a consistent two thirds of smokers say that they want to stop. This suggests that a 21% adult smoking rate masks an underlying "willing smokers" rate of only 7% of the population. On these figures nearly 90% of the shift to a 5% smoking rate could come solely from supporting smokers who wish to stop to succeed in their aim.

The challenge which the next Scottish Government tobacco strategy must address is to identify, develop and support the interventions which can do that.



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