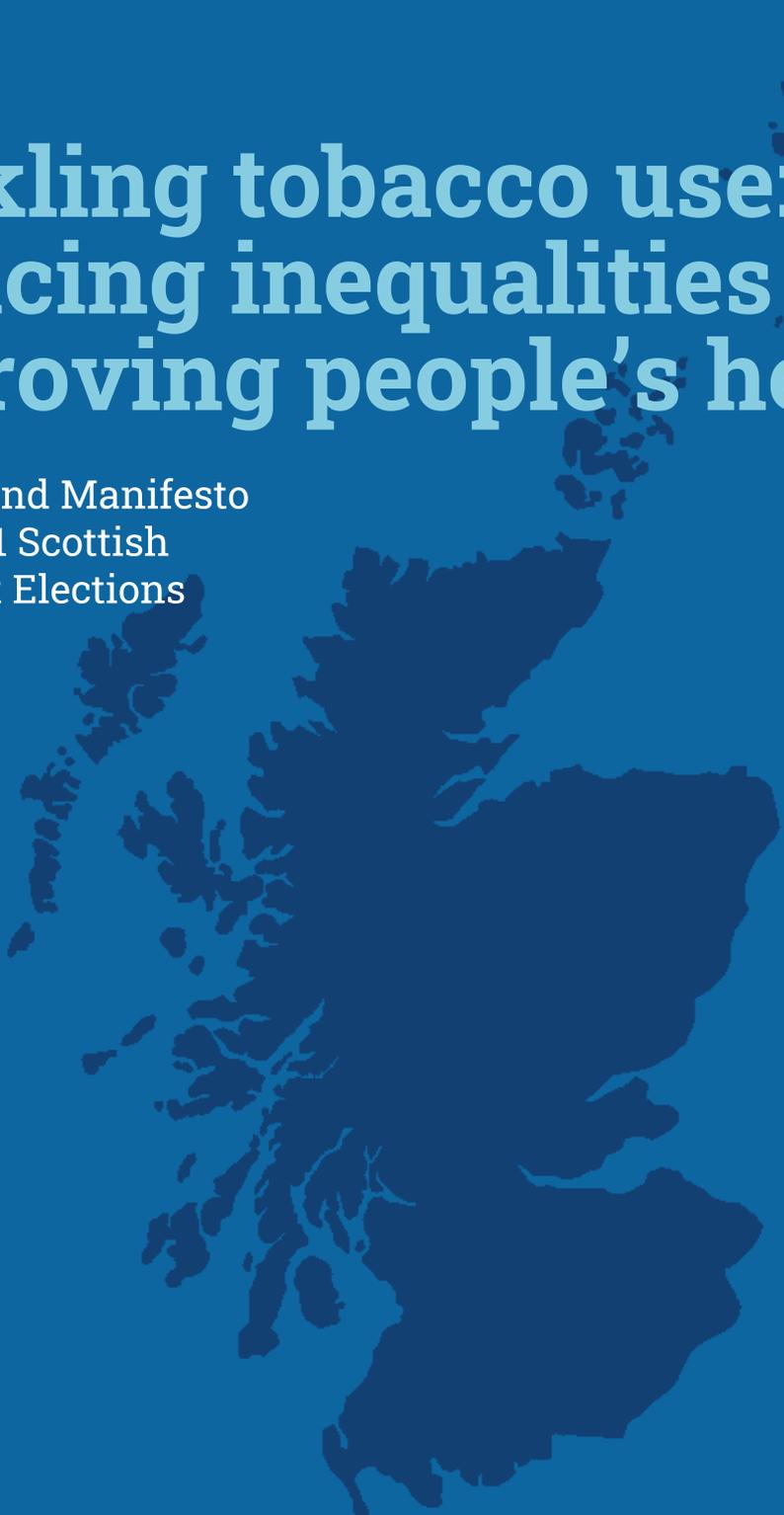


Tackling tobacco use: reducing inequalities and improving people's health



ASH Scotland Manifesto
for the 2021 Scottish
Parliament Elections

ash
scotland
Taking Action on Smoking and Health

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the entrenched health inequalities that exist in our society. In Scotland – where health inequalities between the richest and the poorest are the widest in Western Europe – this has meant that the people who have been most affected by the virus are generally those who had worse health outcomes before the pandemic began, highlighting the need for urgent action to be taken to reduce health inequalities and improve people’s health.

As part of the recovery and renewal process, the next Scottish Government has a significant opportunity to address the health inequalities made worse by the pandemic and create a healthier and more resilient population.

Although health inequalities are caused by a variety of social, political, economic, and environmental determinants, tobacco use exacerbates existing inequalities. One in three (32%) people living in Scotland’s most disadvantaged communities smoke compared to just one in ten (9%) people living in the most affluent areas. Smoking rates are also disproportionately higher amongst people with mental health issues and other vulnerable groups, such as those who are permanently sick or disabled.

Smoking is the biggest cause of preventable ill health and death in Scotland. It results in up to 100,000 hospitalisations and more than 9,000 premature deaths each year – that’s more than alcohol, suicide, drugs, and road accidents combined. Evidence also suggests that smoking can increase the risk of serious illness or death from Covid-19.

Tobacco causes significant financial harms to both the individual and the economy

A person who smokes spends **£1700 to £2150** per year on cigarettes



Smoking costs around **£1.1 billion** to Scotland each year



Smoking is the biggest cause of preventable ill health and death in Scotland

100,000 hospitalisations and **9,000** premature deaths each year



The yearly cost to NHS Scotland is equivalent to over **16,700** nurses’ salaries



Tobacco use also causes significant financial harms, both to household budgets and the wider economy. It is estimated that, on average, a person who smokes spends between £1700 - £2150 per year on cigarettes. Smoking costs, conservatively, around £1.1 billion to Scotland each year – including an estimated £500 million spent by NHS Scotland to treat smoking related diseases. That’s the equivalent of more than 16,700 nurses’ salaries.

Addressing tobacco use will play a significant part in reducing the harm caused by health inequalities and improve well-being, particularly for vulnerable groups, so it is vital the next Scottish Government makes tackling the tobacco epidemic a public health priority.

Tackling inequality is key to creating a tobacco-free Scotland

In 2013, Scotland set an ambitious 'endgame' target of being smoke-free by 2034 – meaning that by 2034 adult smoking rates should be 5% or less. However, smoking prevalence rates in Scotland's most deprived communities recently increased from 27% in 2017 to 32% in 2018. Recent research suggests that we are likely to miss the 2034 target by as many as 16 years, which would result in thousands of extra lives being lost to the tobacco epidemic.

Smoking rates in Scotland's most deprived communities have increased by 5%

One in three people in Scotland's most disadvantaged areas smoke

32%

Compared to just one in ten people in the most affluent areas

9%

If trends continue, we could miss the 2034 target by 16 years



Even if Scotland were to meet the target of 5% adult smoking prevalence by 2034, it is likely that this success would still conceal significant inequality – for example, very low smoking rates amongst the least deprived while smoking rates amongst the most deprived could remain in the double digits.

Current tobacco control policies and measures do not go far enough to help Scotland realise its endgame target and more needs to be done to address the social gradient in smoking if we are to ensure the benefits of a smoke-free Scotland are felt across society.

The next Scottish Government should:

1

Reaffirm their commitment to the 2034 ambition and publish a new tobacco strategy in 2023 when the current strategy expires.

2

Ensure tackling inequalities is at the heart of the development, implementation, and evaluation of all tobacco control policies – prioritising measures and interventions that have been proven to reduce health inequalities. As part of this, consideration should be given to introducing minimum/maximum unit pricing for tobacco products as evidence suggests this could help reduce smoking rates whilst having a positive impact on health inequalities. It is important that any interventions related to price go hand-in-hand with appropriate services and support to help people quit smoking.

3

Maintain funding for smoking cessation and prevention services and explore ways existing services can be improved to reach disadvantaged groups. Evidence shows that getting help and support from a smoking cessation service increases the likelihood that a quit attempt will be successful, so it is important that these services are maintained and accessible to all.

Future proof children and young people from tobacco use and tobacco industry manipulation

Scotland has a strong track record of protecting children and young people from the harms caused by tobacco and recreational nicotine products, but Big Tobacco is constantly looking for new ways to keep their business profitable.



Declining cigarette sales has spurred the tobacco industry to develop 'next generation products' – like e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products – which could keep people addicted to nicotine and tobacco and attract new users, including young people. These products are not yet subject to the same robust regulation as tobacco and there are growing concerns that these products – which are often marketed as being less risky than smoking – could become a route into smoking for children and young people. Preventing children and young people from taking up smoking is key to meeting the 2034 target.

Because the market for 'next generation products' is in its infancy in Scotland, the next Scottish Government has a unique opportunity to get ahead of the tobacco industry and protect children and young people. This is particularly important in reducing health inequalities because young people (aged 16-24) from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are more than twice as likely to smoke as their more affluent peers.

The next Scottish Government should:

1

Closely monitor the use of tobacco and 'next generation products' by children and young people, collecting and publishing yearly statistics about youth smoking and vaping rates, so changes can be detected, and action taken at the earliest possible opportunity.

2

Regulate Heated Tobacco Products in line with other tobacco products. Heated Tobacco Products (HTPs) are tobacco products that require the use of an electronic device to heat a stick or plug of compressed tobacco. There is no independent evidence to suggest that HTPs are less harmful or less toxic than cigarettes, even though Big Tobacco markets these products as "reduced risk". Treating HTPs in the same way as other tobacco products would close this regulatory loophole.

3

Make the Tobacco Register conditional. This would allow Trading Standards and local authorities to take swift action against retailers who sell these products to people under the age of 18 and could help keep tobacco and nicotine products out of the hands of children and young people. A conditional register would also provide a mechanism for introducing new measures on the availability and price of tobacco and recreational nicotine products without the need for further legislation. This would allow Scottish Government to respond more quickly to developments and issues as they emerge which would be particularly useful in relation to the growing and evolving market for e-cigarettes.

Protect our environment from pointless plastic pollution

Plastic cigarette filters are one of the most common forms of litter found on our streets, in our parks and on our beaches. Poor local environmental quality – where issues like litter, fly tipping and graffiti are prevalent – is increasingly being recognised as having a detrimental impact on people’s health and wellbeing. Evidence suggests that local environmental quality in Scotland’s deprived communities is declining more severely and at a faster rate than in more affluent areas, so could exacerbate existing health inequalities.

Most of the nearly 3.65 billion cigarette butts (that’s how many cigarettes are smoked in Scotland each year) contain a filter made of cellulose acetate plastic – which takes years to degrade into progressively smaller pieces all the while leaching toxins into the environment. The plastic pollution from these cigarette filters weighs an estimated 600,000 kg – which is enough to fill 50 bin lorries.

Cigarette filters do not benefit health, although two thirds of smokers think that they do.

600,000 kg of plastic filter pollution is enough to fill 50 bin lorries



Instead they act to make cigarette smoke smoother and more palatable. By making the experience of smoking less harsh, plastic filters also make it easier for people to take up smoking. The ban on menthol cigarettes was introduced because menthol soothes the throat, making it easier for children and young people to experiment with tobacco and get addicted.

This leaves plastic cigarette filters as non-essential consumer items, like plastic straws or cups, but with the added detriment of making smoking more pleasant for children and young people.

Despite all this, cigarette filters have been a neglected element of the plastics debate. The European Union, through the Single Use Plastics Directive, has recognised cigarette butts as one of the key components of plastic pollution – but unlike other single use plastic items which have been subject to a ban or reduction, cigarette butts will only be subject to an Extended Producer Responsibility scheme which will contribute to covering clean-up costs.

The next Scottish Government should:

Take regulatory action to eliminate plastic cigarette filters. Instead of finding more cost-effective ways to clean-up cigarette butts, the focus should be on preventing these pointless plastics from polluting our environment in the first place. The next Scottish Government has the opportunity to become a world leader in the fight against single-use plastics by eliminating a major source of plastic pollution whilst also taking action that could prevent children and young people from taking up smoking. This would help Scotland move towards a circular economy and realise its ambition of being smoke-free by 2034.



Further information and discussion of our policy calls, along with background evidence and references, can be provided upon request.

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