Landmark victory for Australia’s tobacco plain packaging laws

Australia has achieved a major victory in a World Trade Organisation (WTO) dispute over whether its tobacco plain packaging laws are a necessary public health measure and consistent with WTO international trade and investment rules. The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) welcomes the WTO’s decision which signals there is growing international recognition that plain packaging is a significant tobacco control tool.

PHAA CEO Terry Slevin said, “It’s a huge win for public health that the WTO rejected claims by four countries that Australia’s plain packaging laws go against its rules. The tobacco industry had fought this reform at every possible corner. Largely because they are concerned about the impact it will have on their capacity to recruit new users for their deadly products. Plain packaging is now being adopted by a number of countries around the world.”

“The credit for this important public health reform goes to both sides of Australian politics. While Labor initiated it, the Coalition has consistently and staunchly defended this important legislation and are to be commended for this. This has rightly become a bipartisan position,” Mr Slevin said.

He continued, “Recognition should also be given to public health colleagues at the Cancer Council of Victoria who have committed significant resources to researching, promoting implementation and defending plain packaging.”

In its Australia’s Health 2018 report last week, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare noted that smoking rates in Australian teenagers fell from 5% in 2013 down to 2.1% in 2016.

“This reinforces one of the primary objectives of plain packaging which was to dissuade children in taking up smoking,” said Mr Slevin.

“This is a public health reform all Australians can be proud of. We are a world leader in tobacco control and most importantly, this means the health of the Australian people is better protected from the harms caused by tobacco,” Mr Slevin concluded.

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