



## Evaluating the impact of Picture Health Warnings on Cigarette Packets

- Graphic picture health warnings printed on the reverse of cigarette packets were introduced in England on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2008.
- Health warnings have been proven to be an effective way of communicating the health risks associated with smoking. Countries such as Canada and Australia have shown that picture health warnings are more effective than text-based warnings alone.
- This study is the first assessment of the impact of picture health warnings upon knowledge of the health risks of smoking, smoking-related behaviour, attitudes to smoking and to the health warning messages themselves. It assessed impacts in spring 2009, 7-9 months after their introduction.
- The range and depth of knowledge about the health risks of smoking did not change after the pictures were introduced. However, awareness of some conditions depicted by the picture warnings, such as gum/mouth disease or oral cancer, increased significantly. These health warning pictures are arguably the most graphic and were the messages that smokers reported had made them think about their smoking behaviour.
- After the picture health warnings had been introduced, more adults (aged 18+) and young people (aged 13-17) agreed that the message made smoking seem less attractive and more adults agreed that the messages 'put me off smoking'.
- Smokers (aged 18+) were more likely to report that the messages made them think about quitting smoking after the pictures were introduced.
- There were very few smoking-related behaviour changes observed after the pictures were introduced. It remains to be seen whether emotional reactions, such as thinking about quitting or the messages making smoking seem less attractive, are translated into behaviour change in the future.
- The impact of the picture health warnings was modest and not as great as observed in countries such as Canada or Australia. This may be reflect differences in tobacco control policy or methodological differences in assessing the impact of the picture warnings. However, in Canada and Australia, the picture health warnings are larger than in England and are displayed on both the front and reverse of the cigarette packet. They are therefore more prominent and noticeable than in England, where the pictures are only displayed on the reverse of the packet.

**Details of research team:**

Heather Wardle<sup>a</sup>, Deanna Pickup<sup>a</sup>, Lucy Lee<sup>a</sup>, Julia Hall<sup>a</sup>, Kevin Pickering<sup>a</sup>, Kristi Grieg<sup>a</sup>, Crawford Moodie<sup>b</sup>, Anne-Marie MacKintosh<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> National Centre for Social Research

<sup>b</sup> Institute for Social Marketing, University of Stirling

**Address for correspondence:**

Heather Wardle, 35 Northampton Square, London, EC1V0AX.

Email:heather.wardle@natcen.ac.uk

**About PHRC:** The Public Health Research Consortium (PHRC) is funded by the Department of Health Policy Research Programme. The PHRC brings together researchers from 11 UK institutions and aims to strengthen the evidence base for public health, with a strong emphasis on tackling socioeconomic inequalities in health. For more information, visit: [www.york.ac.uk/phrc/index.htm](http://www.york.ac.uk/phrc/index.htm)

**Disclaimer:** The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the PHRC or the Department of Health Policy Research Programme.