

EMBARGOED UNTIL 5.15pm Wednesday 28th April

Quitline Prepares for Influx as Tobacco Tax Increase Signalled

With the three-tiered increases on tobacco tax signalled today, The Quit Group is preparing to see the number of people contacting Quitline for help to quit smoking to double or even triple.

"The last time we saw a significant taxation increase for tobacco was back in May 2000. Overnight we saw our call volumes almost triple from 6000 to 16,000 calls per month," Paula Snowden, Chief Executive of The Quit Group explains.

"The tax equity between tailor made cigarettes and roll-your-own loose tobacco is the right thing to do. Smoking kills however it is inhaled and all the current price difference does is make smoking more accessible, especially for younger people and those on lower incomes," adds Paula.

Paula makes it clear that The Quit Group commends anything that encourages people to think about quitting, but recognises that any significant change always presents both challenges and opportunities.

"Around seven out of ten smokers want to quit and many will tell you quitting is easy - staying quit is hard.

Paula points out that it takes on average 6 serious attempts to break the habit for good. "For those who have tried before there is always a good day and a good reason to try again and the price rise may be just that reason," she adds.

"It is important to remember that smoking is an addiction. The Quit Group will help people with the challenge of staying quit by providing patches, gum or lozenges to help with the cravings. We'll also support people to manage the other elements of their addiction – those habitual and emotional triggers."

Paula adds, "We fully expect to see an increase in quit attempts, which is great, and our advisors are there to help people using the tax increases as a prompt for thinking about those other, more sustainable reasons for overcoming their addiction.

"The tax changes will certainly provide a strong incentive to discourage new smokers, particularly our youth, from taking up the habit. And, while the increases are likely to place a short-term stress on those currently addicted to nicotine, that's what The Quit Group is here for – help when it's needed.

"The good news is that those who contact Quitline are five times more likely to succeed - and that makes all the difference."

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1. Contact Carl Billington (029 770 0317) for more information or requests for comment/interviews. Interviews are available in Te Reo on request.
2. The Quitline number is 0800 778 778
3. Additional notes to reporter:
 - The last time there was a significant increase in tobacco tax was in May 2000. With a 14% tax increase and additional price increases from tobacco companies, this led to a 20% price increase for a packet of cigarettes.
 - As a result, The Quitline experienced an immediate increase in the volume of calls moving from an average of 6,000 calls a month to 16,000 calls in the month of May 2000.
 - The New Zealand Medical Journal reported results from a survey of Maori audiences last year in which 65% indicated support for a significant increase in tobacco tax providing the revenue generated was used to support or promote healthy lifestyles, including helping smokers quit.
 - Tobacco smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in New Zealand
 - According to New Zealand studies, one in five smokers is thinking about quitting or trying to quit at any given point in time and 70% of smokers have tried to quit in the last 12 months.
 - There are approximately 650,000 smokers in New Zealand