

Media Release

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New research shows menthol in tobacco products keeps smokers hooked

Cancer Council says new evidence points to need for menthol ban

Cancer Council has strengthened its call for the removing of flavours from tobacco products, following new research showing menthol in cigarettes makes it harder for smokers to quit.

The new study of almost 6000 smokers in the US trying to quit showed that those who used menthol cigarettes were 53% more likely to keep smoking over a 12-month period compared with the general study group. By contrast, smokers of menthol varieties who switched to non-menthol products increased their likelihood of not smoking for more than 30 days by 58%.

Libby Jardine, Chair, Tobacco Issues Committee, Cancer Council said the study, recently published in Tobacco Control, demonstrated why Cancer Council was calling on the Australian Government to prohibit the use of flavours in tobacco products.

“All cigarettes are deadly and their use in Australia causes premature death in two-in-three long-term smokers. It’s still our biggest cause of cancer death,” Ms Jardine said.

“The tobacco industry has long used flavours, even those a smoker might not be able to taste, to mask the harsh effects of their products as they progressively kill their users.

“The research shows exactly why the tobacco industry laces products with flavours like menthol – flavours keep people smoking and their removal helps people quit.

“Australian research also shows flavourings and filter capsules, including menthol, have a particular allure for young people.

“The Australian Government is currently conducting a review of tobacco control legislation and refining it’s National Preventive Health Strategy. This latest evidence clearly shows one way the Australian Government can help smokers quit and deter new smokers – by prohibiting menthol and other flavours.

“We are fortunate to have a health minister in Greg Hunt who has committed to reducing smoking rates in Australia to below 10% by 2025. This is the sort of evidence that should inform and enable Minister Hunt and his department to convert commitment into outcomes.”

Cancer Council is calling for the ban on menthol and flavours as a part of a comprehensive strategy to drive down smoking rates. Other recommendations including rolling out a well-funded mass media anti-smoking campaign, removing the ability for tobacco companies to incentivise retailers or advertise to them, and restrictions on pack sizes.

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