

# Pictures save lives

## Large graphic health warnings work



**HRIDAY** HEALTH RELATED INFORMATION  
DISSEMINATION AMONGST YOUTH



Pictorial health warnings (PHWs) are the most effective way of communicating ill effects of tobacco use, particularly among those with low literacy or no formal education. In a country like India, where one-third of the population is illiterate,<sup>1</sup> pictorial health warnings communicate health messages effectively and can influence decisions. Large and effective PHWs discourage non-users, particularly youth, from starting, encourage current users to stop and prevent relapse of those who have already quit. They detract from the glamour and appeal of tobacco product packages and help gaining public acceptance for other tobacco control measures such as establishing tobacco-free norms.

### History of health warnings on tobacco products in India

- The Cigarettes Act of 1975 introduced the first 'text only' health warning i.e. 'Cigarette smoking is injurious to health' in India.
- Section 7 of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act, 2003 (COTPA) mandates that no person can produce, supply, distribute or import any tobacco product unless every tobacco product package carries a specified warning including a pictorial warning as may be prescribed by the rules.
- The first set of pictorial health warnings were notified in July 2006 and were to come into force from February 1, 2007. However, after much delay and dilution a set of very mild images covering 40% of the principal display area on one side of tobacco products were implemented from May 31, 2009.
- These warnings were rotational in nature and were required to be changed every 12 months.
- New field-tested, stronger warnings were notified in March 2010 for depiction from June 1, 2010. However, these were delayed to December 1, 2010 but were never implemented. Moreover the rotation time was changed to 24 months.
- A new set of warnings were notified on May 27, 2011 to be implemented from December 1, 2011. Following a controversy over the notified warnings, revised warnings were notified on September 27, 2012 to be implemented from April 1, 2013.
- In February 2014, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) constituted an Expert Committee to study global standards on PHWs and suggest field tested warnings for notification.
- Based on the Committee's suggestions MoHFW amended the packaging and labeling rules and notified new set of Rules on October 15, 2014 with 85% pictorial health warnings on both side of the pack to be implemented from April 1, 2015.
- However, while considering, the Rules the Committee on Subordinate Legislation (Lok Sabha) in its interim report recommended delaying the implementation after intense pressure from the tobacco industry.

- For now, the 85% warnings, which are field tested and would put India in a position of international leadership, have been put on hold.

### Pictorial warnings help in tobacco cessation

- Evidence from various countries show that pictorial health warnings have reduced tobacco use among consumers and have increased their readiness to quit.<sup>ii</sup>
- According to the Global Adult Tobacco Survey India Report (2010), one of three current users thought of quitting on seeing the PHW
- Health warnings on tobacco packaging capture attention, educate effectively about the health hazards of smoking and make smoking unattractive.
- A smoker who smokes 20 cigarettes per day is potentially exposed to the pictorial warnings 7300 times a year.<sup>iii</sup>
- Large warning labels are the most effective. Warning labels must be large enough to be easily noticed and read, and should be as large as possible.<sup>iv</sup>
- Large comprehensive pictorial health warnings have great impact on young smokers by reducing their consumption levels.<sup>v</sup>



### Worst global rankings on PHWs over the years

- In 2010, an international report by the Canadian Cancer Society on PHWs ranked India at an abysmal 100<sup>th</sup> position in comparison to other countries vis-à-vis warning labels. The rankings further plummeted to 122<sup>nd</sup> in 2012 and tanked to 136<sup>th</sup> in 2014 as per the subsequent reports.
- Implementation of the October 15, 2014 notified 85% pictorial health warnings will place India among the global leaders in tobacco control.



### Pictorial warnings are effective - Global and national evidence

- Canada was the first country to implement health warnings on cigarette packets in 2000.
- Brazil, leading the global production and export of FCV tobacco has 50% warning on tobacco packs (100% one side).<sup>vi</sup>
- Globally, nearly 80 countries require pictorial health warnings on tobacco products among which 60 countries require the warnings to cover more than 50% whereas countries with the largest warnings are in the South East Asia Region, i.e. Nepal require 90%,<sup>vii</sup> Thailand 85%,<sup>viii</sup> Pakistan 85%,<sup>ix</sup> Sri Lanka 80%.<sup>x</sup> Australia leads the world with plain packaging of tobacco products with pictorial warnings covering 82.5%.

### Pictorial warnings prevent youth initiation

- Large pictorial health warnings are an effective means of tobacco prevention, because they prevent young people from initiating tobacco use.
- A study amongst youth in Canada and the UK shows that pictorial warnings make smoking less attractive.<sup>xi</sup>



- A study in India shows that warnings with pictures are significantly more likely to draw attention, improve memory for the accompanying text and act as deterrent.<sup>xii</sup>
- In a survey conducted in Mexico, it was found that pictorial warnings featuring "graphic" depictions of disease were significantly more effective on young smokers than text only warnings.<sup>xiii</sup>
- In a survey conducted under the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project in China, it was found that pictorial warnings were rated as the most effective by youth.<sup>xiv</sup>
- Effectiveness of health warnings and messages increases with their size. According to a study in 2012 in India, 53% of the participants first notice the branding on tobacco packs and only 28% reported seeing the warnings.
- Larger warnings will elicit more negative perceptions about packs and tobacco use and will increase the efficacy of health warnings.

### Treaty Obligation: WHO-Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

- Article 4 of the Convention states that Parties shall be guided, inter alia, by the principle that every person should be informed of the health consequences, addictive nature and mortal threat posed by tobacco consumption and exposure to tobacco smoke.
- Article 11 of the WHO-Framework Convention on Tobacco Control requires that tobacco product packages carry large, clear, rotating health warnings and messages.
- Guidelines adopted for effective implementation of Article 11 outline several actions for the parties including plain packaging.

*"Parties should consider adopting measures to restrict or prohibit the use of logos, colours, brand images or promotional information on packaging other than brand names and product names displayed in a standard colour and font style (plain packaging)."*



- According to the World Health Organisation for less than five rupees per person per year India will be able to pay for the four best buys in tobacco control policy – including large pictorial health warnings on tobacco product packages.

### Public support for plain packaging in India

- In 2012, Australia became the first country in the world to adopt plain packaging of tobacco products to protect youth from tobacco imagery and promotion. United Kingdom and Ireland have followed Australia in announcing plain packaging while France and New Zealand are actively considering plain packaging.
- Plain packaging prohibits the use of logos, colors, brand names or prominent information on packaging which would make the products less attractive.<sup>xv</sup>
- Lok Sabha MP Baijayant Panda has introduced a Private Members' Bill in the Parliament seeking plain packaging of tobacco products in the country.<sup>xvi</sup>
- The Allahabad High Court, in the matter of Love Care Foundation v. Union of India & Anr urged the Indian Government to study the feasibility of plain packaging of cigarettes and other tobacco products.
- According to a study conducted in Delhi, majority of the people and stakeholders support plain packaging of tobacco products in India.<sup>xvii</sup>



## Implement larger, stronger and effective pictorial health warnings on all tobacco products with immediate effect.

Pictures save lives – choose and save millions



85% pictorial health warnings put on hold since April 1, 2015

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