

# Young New Zealanders want a tobacco-free future - new research

6 December 2023

Jude Ball, Janet Hoek, Andrew Waa, Janine Nip, James Stanley, Richard Edwards



**BRIEFING** to the  **Incoming Government**

## Summary

The new coalition government's plan to repeal Aotearoa's world-leading smokefree law flies in the face of public opinion, with new research demonstrating strong support for smokefree measures from those who will ultimately be most affected — teens and young adults. In this Briefing we report these new findings from an International Tobacco Control (ITC) survey conducted in Aotearoa in August-September 2023.

A storm of protest has erupted following the announcement that Aotearoa New Zealand's world-leading smokefree laws are set to be axed as part of the coalition agreement between National, ACT and New Zealand First. The New Zealand public has been blindsided by the move, which none of the coalition parties actively campaigned on.

The Smokefree 2025 goal, and associated legislation and key measures, have previously been shown to enjoy wide public support, including among people who smoke. The measures the new government is set to repeal include reducing the number of retail outlets able to sell smoked tobacco products, requiring nicotine in smoked tobacco products to be reduced to very low and non-addictive levels, and a smokefree generation policy making it illegal to sell smoked tobacco products to people born on or after 1 January 2009.

## **New research**

New research released today, shows young people in Aotearoa aged 16-29 (N=3414 people surveyed) overwhelmingly support the smokefree 2025 goal and the three key measures the new government is set to abandon. It shows 78% of young people support major reductions in tobacco retail outlet numbers (Fig 1a), and 68% support a law requiring manufacturers to take the nicotine out of smoked tobacco products (Fig 1b). The smokefree generation policy had the strongest support of the three measures, with 79% in support (Fig 1c).

When asked about the Smokefree 2025 goal itself, 80% supported or strongly supported the goal (Fig 2). Findings among teens aged 16-19 (N=1019) and young adults aged 20-29 (N=2389) were similar.

Importantly, even young people who smoked (N=709) expressed majority support for all three policies. This finding aligns with previous local and international research showing that a large majority of people who smoke regret having started, and most want to quit. It also aligns with in-depth qualitative studies which have shown that, rather than limiting their 'freedom' to smoke, many young smokers see these measures as supporting their emancipation from a deadly tobacco addiction. In short, most young people welcome restrictions on the availability and addictiveness of tobacco, regardless of their smoking status.

The majority of young people who smoked indicated that they would cut down or quit smoking entirely if the smokefree laws were implemented. For example, two out of three (66%) teens who smoked said they would cut down or quit smoking if the number of retailers selling smoked tobacco products was greatly reduced. These findings underline the likely effectiveness of the laws, which has also been demonstrated by other research, including modelling studies. Our previous briefings summarise the evidence base for retailer reduction, denicotinisation, and smokefree generation policies, and, importantly, counter exaggerated concerns about potential impacts on the black market.

## **The survey**

The ITC Youth & Youth Adult Survey is an annual multi-country survey which included New Zealand for the first time in 2023. Participants were drawn from commercial online panels, with Nielsen hosting the survey. For more about the methods and findings, please refer to the online research report.

In summary, the ITC Youth & Young Adult Survey findings show that young New Zealanders overwhelmingly support the measures that the coalition government plans to abandon, adding to previous evidence that the public support the smokefree laws. We call on the Prime Minister and Health Minister to listen to the New Zealand people and reverse this

politically damaging and unpopular decision.

## What is new in this briefing?

- The newly formed coalition Government has indicated it intends to repeal the Smokefree Environments and Regulated Products (Smoked Tobacco) Amendment Act., despite evidence of its popularity and likely effectiveness.
- New findings from the ITC Youth & Young Adult Survey, conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand in August-September 2023, show 16- to 29-year-olds overwhelmingly support the Smokefree 2025 goal and the three key policy measures the government intends to repeal.
- These findings add to a body of evidence that New Zealanders, including people who smoke and young people, overwhelmingly want a smokefree future.

## Implications for public health practice and policy

- Aotearoa's world-leading Smokefree measures aimed at protecting young people from deadly and addictive tobacco products should be retained, since evidence shows they are both popular and likely to be effective.
- The Prime Minister still has an opportunity to heed the will of the New Zealand people, show leadership, and reverse this ill-advised decision.

### Author details

Dr Jude Ball, ASPIRE Aotearoa Research Centre, and Senior Research Fellow, Department of Public Health, University of Otago Wellington

Prof Janet Hoek, Co-Director of ASPIRE Aotearoa Research Centre, and Department of Public Health, University of Otago Wellington

Assoc Prof Andrew Waa, Co-Director of ASPIRE Aotearoa Research Centre, Eru Pomare Centre, University of Otago Wellington

Dr Janine Nip, Public Health Research Fellow at the Department of Public Health, University of Otago, Wellington, New Zealand

Assoc Prof James Stanley Director of the Biostatistical Group for the University of Otago, Wellington

Prof Richard Edwards, Co-Director of ASPIRE Aotearoa Research Centre, and Department of Public Health, University of Otago Wellington

*This article is part of the series Briefings to the Incoming Government, highlighting challenges and opportunities in the public health policy space.*



Public Health Expert Briefing (ISSN 2816-1203)

---

**Source URL:**

<https://www.phcc.org.nz/briefing/young-new-zealanders-want-tobacco-free-future-new-research>