

Smokefree Action Coalition Strategy 2016 – 2020

Make smoking history for our children

1. Introduction

Although good progress has been made to reduce the harm caused by tobacco, smoking still kills. Around 100,000 people die prematurely from a smoking-related disease in the UK every year, more than the next six causes of premature death put together including obesity, alcohol and illegal drugs. Hundreds of children start smoking every day and one in two who become long-term smokers will die early as a result.

The Smokefree Action Coalition (SFAC) is a group of over 300 organisations committed to promoting public health and campaigning to reduce the harm caused by tobacco.¹ The SFAC's geographical remit is England for devolved matters such as health, and UK-wide for reserved matters, such as international policy issues, tax and smuggling.² The previous SFAC strategy was updated in 2012 and ran until the end of the last Parliament.

The UK Government is committed to reducing smoking prevalence and uptake, including by increasing tax and tackling illicit tobacco. Policies designed to reduce uptake and encourage quitting smoking help contribute to a wide range of government aims including:

- To reduce the rate of stillbirths, neonatal and maternal deaths in England by 50% by 2030. ([DH announcement 13 November 2015](#))
- To transform the life chances of the poorest in our country ([The Life Chances Strategy](#) January 2016)
- To improve the physical health of those with mental health conditions ([Five Year Forward View for Mental Health](#) February 2016)
- To help the NHS deliver on its commitment to achieve significant efficiency savings by a radical upgrade in prevention and public health (as set out in the [Autumn statement 2015](#) and [NHS Five Year Forward View](#))
- To meet the Independent Cancer Task Force targets in [Achieving world-class cancer outcomes: a strategy for England 2015-2020](#) to reduce adult smoking prevalence to 13%, and to 21% for in routine and manual workers by 2020
- To reduce the mortality from the four main preventable noncommunicable diseases – cardiovascular disease, cancer, chronic lung disease and diabetes – by 25% between the year 2010 and 2025 with a target for reduction in smoking prevalence of 30%. (66th World Health Assembly decision [WHA66.10](#))
- To develop, implement, periodically update and review comprehensive multisectoral national tobacco control strategies, plans and programmes in accordance with the [WHO FCTC](#).

This document sets out the strategy for the SFAC between now and the next election, which is due in 2020. The SFAC will review this strategy in the run up to the general election. The document incorporates the outputs of a series of SFAC stakeholder meetings held in December 2015 and January 2016.

2. The Smokefree Action Coalition's goals

The SFAC's goal is to continue to reduce the harm from tobacco by ensuring that an effective, fully funded comprehensive tobacco control strategy is a central element of government health policy.

The SFAC has 3 key objectives under this overarching goal:

1. Securing sufficient and sustainable funding for tobacco control at all levels.
2. Publication by the Government of a new comprehensive tobacco control plan for England. The Plan should include at its heart:
 - a commitment to protecting children and tackling inequalities;
 - ambitious targets for reducing uptake and encouraging quitting, including for high risk groups; and
 - a comprehensive range of evidence-based tobacco control measures.
3. The new tobacco strategy must be fully implemented and appropriately funded at national and local level, as well as at intermediate tiers where appropriate.

More detailed recommendations for evidence-based policy measures designed to reduce smoking prevalence are set out in the [Smoking Still Kills](#) report, endorsed by 130 SFAC members.

Our success will be demonstrated by smoking prevalence continuing to fall. Specific ambitions agreed by the SFAC, as set out in Smoking Still Kills, include:

- Smoking rates fall in the adult population to 13% by 2020 and 9% by 2025
- Smoking rates among routine and manual socio-economic groups fall to 21% by 2020 and 16% by 2025
- Prevalence of smoking in pregnancy reduced to less than 6% by 2020.
- A reduction in regular and occasional smoking among 15-year-olds to 9% per cent by 2020 and 2% by 2025
- In the longer term, adult smoking prevalence is reduced to less than 5% in all socio-economic groups by 2035.

3. Situation analysis

Successes since the last SFAC strategy (dated July 2012)

- The Coalition Government's ambitions for smoking prevalence contained in the previous Tobacco Control Plan for England have been met.
- Strong cross-party support across Parliament for comprehensive tobacco strategies and tobacco control measures ensured a range of legislative measures were passed including prohibition on smoking in cars when children under 18 are present, proxy purchasing of cigarettes and age of sale for electronic cigarettes all of which came into force in October 2015; plus standardised packaging and a new Tobacco Products Directive which will be implemented from May 2016.
- The APPG on Smoking and Health was re-established after the 2015 General Election with a new Chair, Conservative MP Bob Blackman, and active officers and members from all the main political parties.
- High levels of public support for tobacco control measures have been maintained.
- High levels of compliance with existing legislation have been sustained.
- SFAC membership has grown substantially to over 300 members with local authorities and local tobacco alliances now strongly represented.
- Following the transition of public health from NHS to local authorities, SFAC members have played a key role in communicating the tobacco control evidence base to decision makers in local authorities.
- The current Government has committed to publishing a new tobacco strategy in Summer 2016.

- The current government has updated its anti-smuggling strategy, is committed to ratifying the Illicit Trade Protocol to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) and has increased funding for tackling the illicit trade.
- The current government has committed Overseas Development Aid funding to support implementation of the WHO FCTC in low and middle income countries.

Current challenges

- Despite the progress we have made in reducing prevalence hundreds of children in the UK start smoking every day. One in two who become long-term smokers will die early as a result.
- Smoking remains the primary cause of health inequalities with the highest rates found among those who are most disadvantaged, for example those living in poverty and with mental health conditions.
- Smoking remains the greatest modifiable risk factor for poor outcomes in pregnancy.
- The NHS faces a funding gap of at least £22 billion a year by 2020.
- Reductions in public health funding pose a threat to the delivery of smoking cessation services and tobacco control at all levels and loss of expertise and capacity throughout the system is likely.
 - Early indications are that funding reductions in national mass media spend are already having a negative impact.
 - Funding for regional tobacco control activity is under pressure and has been cut completely in the south west, and
 - Local authorities are cutting funding to regulatory services and stop smoking services.
- Key tobacco datasets are being discontinued, or cutback, or are threatened as the Government reviews frequency of statistical bulletins because of budget cuts.
- There is a risk that the public and politicians no longer see tobacco control as a key priority after the legislative successes of the last 5 years.
- Achieving policy consensus around electronic cigarettes remains difficult.

4. Action needed to achieve SFAC goals

Securing sustainable funding for tobacco control

Securing sustainable funding for tobacco control is a key priority for the SFAC. The Coalition should advocate for this at all levels and is well placed to highlight the impact of public health budget cuts on tobacco control activities to government, the media and other stakeholders.

Securing a new tobacco plan for England and supporting its delivery where appropriate

As of January 2016, England has been without a current tobacco control strategy. If we are to maintain our progress and continue driving down smoking rates, it is vital that the Government publish a new tobacco control strategy. The SFAC should use its collective voice to support this and to ensure that the recommendations within the new strategy are comprehensive and evidence-based.

The SFAC also has a role to play once the strategy is published, by working with Public Health England, the NHS, local authorities and the Department of Health in supporting implementation of the new tobacco strategy and its recommendations.

Engaging the NHS and health professionals

According to the NHS Five Year Forward View, even after the £8 billion additional NHS funding promised by the Government there will be a funding gap of £22 billion a year by 2020. The report acknowledges that *“The future health of millions of children, the*

sustainability of the NHS and the economic prosperity of Britain all now depend on a radical upgrade in prevention and public health.” The NHS comes into contact with millions of smokers; SFAC has a key role to play in engaging organisations and professionals at all levels of the NHS with tobacco control and smoking cessation.

Harnessing the potential of all members of the SFAC

The SFAC has now grown to over 300 members, including key national charities, NHS organisations, local authorities, local tobacco alliances, professional bodies and Royal Colleges. Ensuring that members are fully engaged with the Coalition and its overarching goals and that there is consensus among members on key issues is critical. The SFAC should also continue to seek new members in areas where tobacco policy is a priority, including mental health and local NHS organisations.

Championing the evidence base

The SFAC continues to have an important role to play in championing the evidence base for the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of tobacco policies, including the identification and dissemination of good practice.

Supporting the delivery of tobacco control at the local level

The SFAC provides evidence to local tobacco alliances, Directors of Public Health, local charities and other public health and tobacco policy advocates who need to reach local decision makers to make the case for tobacco control policies. Continuing to provide this evidence is critical in the current funding environment. Supporting supra-local work and promoting the evidence base around the effectiveness and cost effectiveness of tobacco control work carried out at the regional level is also important.

The SFAC also has a key role to play in identifying and promoting evidence-based practice, providing toolkits and materials aimed at the key audiences and working with the messengers most suited to influencing the key decision makers.

Highlighting the tactics of the tobacco industry

The SFAC has an important role to play in ensuring that the UK continues to protect its public health policy with respect to tobacco from the commercial and vested interests of the tobacco industry in line with its obligations under Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC. The tobacco industry continues to present itself as socially responsible, both within the UK and globally. The tobacco industry also uses ‘front’ groups organisations to help promote its messages. The SFAC has to date played a crucial role in highlighting the links between the tobacco industry and its front organisations like FOREST and the Tobacco Retailers Alliance and should continue to do so.

Maintaining parliamentary support

The SFAC has been successful in establishing and maintaining positive relationships with the government, the opposition and parliamentarians. These relationships will be crucial to securing effective delivery of the forthcoming DH Tobacco Plan, successful implementation of standardised ‘plain’ packaging legislation and in helping shape the political parties’ manifestos in advance of the next election.

International

Now the EU Tobacco Products Directive has been revised and is in the process of being implemented, the priorities at international level are in the areas of illicit trade and tobacco taxation. In particular securing UK ratification of the Illicit Trade Protocol and ensuring that the review of the EU Tobacco Tax Directive leads to a reduction in the differential between the minimum rates of taxation for different tobacco products in order to reduce downtrading.

Key relationships

- Government: A key SFAC priority is securing a new Government tobacco control plan.
- APPG on Smoking and Health: It is important that the SFAC continues to maintain strong links with APPG Members and other Parliamentary champions, supporting them to keep tobacco control on the political agenda.
- Backbench MPs: The SFAC needs to continue to counter the efforts of the tobacco industry which routinely briefs backbench MPs against tobacco control measures and tries to roll back existing legislation such as smokefree laws.
- Opposition parties: The SFAC will maintain positive relationships with the Opposition, to continue building cross-party support for tobacco control measures.
- Public Health England: The SFAC has a role to play in ensuring that tobacco control remains a key priority for the PHE and supporting the work of the Tobacco Team where appropriate in implementation of the new tobacco strategy and its recommendations.
- Directors of Public Health: The SFAC has strong links with Directors of Public Health through the Faculty of Public Health and Association of Directors of Public Health which are members of the Coalition. These links are critical to the Coalition's ability to disseminate information to Directors of Public Health.
- Local authorities: With local authorities now responsible for the delivery of public health, continuing to develop strong relationships with local councils and provide support to tobacco control leads is a priority for the SFAC.
- Key professional bodies whose members are responsible for ensuring compliance with tobacco control laws and taking enforcement measures.
- General public: Sustaining the already high levels of support for tobacco control policies including regulatory measures such as the smokefree laws, age of sale laws and plain standardised packaging of tobacco products as well as for non-regulatory measures such as stop smoking services and mass media campaigns.
- Media: Ensuring the media remains interested and informed about tobacco issues and are provided with up to date information and evidence.
- International: The SFAC also needs to engage internationally at EU level and with the WHO FCTC on tobacco to support policy developments which help further tobacco control domestically.

5. Key messages for the SFAC

- Smoking still kills. Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable premature death killing 100,000 people every year in the UK.
- Tobacco is an addiction of childhood; two-thirds of smokers report that they took up smoking before the age of 18.
- Hundreds of children start smoking every day and one in two who become long-term smokers will die early as a result.
- Smoking is the biggest cause of health inequalities.
- The UK is a world leader in tobacco control but the progress we have made so far is under threat as a result of funding cuts to public health.
- If we are to continue to help smokers quit and discourage young people from taking up a deadly habit, the tobacco industry must pay more towards tackling this enormous public health problem.

Last updated: April, 2016

¹ For more information see the [SFAC website](#)

² [ASH Scotland](#), [ASH Wales](#), and ASH Northern Ireland lead on tobacco health policy in their nations.