

20 July 2011

Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Health and Ageing
House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Submission No. 21
(Plain Packaging Bill)
A.O.C. Date: 20/07/2011

Email: haa.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary

Tobacco Plain Packaging Bill 2011
Trade Marks Amendment (Tobacco Plain Packaging) Bill 2011

I am writing to express The Benevolent Society's support of the proposed legislation to implement plain packaging of tobacco products in Australia.

The Benevolent Society, Australia's first charity, is a secular non-profit organisation with over 1,700 staff and volunteers at the forefront of tackling disadvantage and poverty in New South Wales and Queensland. In 2010 we spent over \$75m supporting more than 31,000 vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals, families and communities. Our goal is to help people overcome barriers preventing them from participating fully in society, and in so doing, to help create caring and inclusive communities and a just society. Our vision is that every person is healthy, safe, connected and has a meaningful and productive role in their community.

Much of our work is with disadvantaged children and families and we are thus very aware of the link between smoking, disadvantage and poor health. We also work to support people with mental illness among whom smoking rates are very high. We have been involved in projects with our Aboriginal staff to increase their awareness of strategies available to support quitting, both for themselves and for their clients.

It is well established that smoking is much more common among disadvantaged groups compared to the community as a whole, and that smoking reinforces disadvantage. Disadvantaged smokers spend a higher proportion on their income on smoking meaning that they have less money available for essentials such as food, clothing and housing. The higher rates of illness and disability associated with smoking also reduce employment opportunities and increase health costs, and thus tend to further entrench disadvantage. Disadvantaged smokers are also more likely than others to be heavy and long term smokers.

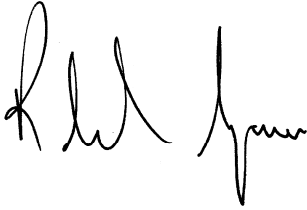
The relationship between smoking, financial stress and disadvantage is complex and reciprocal. For example, among young people in disadvantaged families, growing up with and being surrounded by smokers can make smoking seem normal.

Branding is a powerful force. In the case of tobacco products, it creates associations between brand names and package design and positive personal characteristics, social identity and aspirations. We therefore support strategies that will help break these associations and reduce the attractiveness and appeal of tobacco products, to young people in particular.

We therefore support the Tobacco Plain Packaging Bill 2011 and associated Trade Marks Amendment (Tobacco Plain Packaging) Bill 2011. We see this proposed legislation as an important strategy to limit the exposure of the public to messages and images that may persuade people to start or continue smoking.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of further assistance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Spencer', written in a cursive style.

Richard Spencer
Chief Executive Officer