Should we pay all smokers to quit smoking?

A mixed methods survey exploring smokers’ perceptions of financial incentives

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Background

• NZ has strong history in tobacco control:
  ▪ 1990 - Tobacco sponsorship banned
  ▪ 2004 - Smokefree bars & restaurants
  ▪ 2010 - Ongoing annual 10% tax increases
  ▪ 2012 - Point of sale display bans
  ▪ 2018 - Standardised packaging

• Government’s smokefree goal:
  ▪ “…reducing smoking prevalence and tobacco availability to *minimal levels*... by 2025”
35.3% of NZ’s indigenous Māori are current smokers, as are 24.5% of Pacific people

600,000 people need support to quit if NZ is to achieve the 2025 smokefree goal
Background

- Endgames require innovative interventions for cessation
- Financial incentives effective among pregnant smokers and in workplaces
- Could financial incentive schemes be rolled out to general population of smokers?
- The acceptability among smokers would influence adoption
Methods

• Online survey of 623 current smokers
• Convenience sample (internet panel)
• Assessed support for and perceived effectiveness of:
  ▪ Financial incentive schemes generally
  ▪ Government vs employer funded schemes
  ▪ Deposit-based vs reward-only schemes
• Descriptive statistics; logistic regression
• Open-ended question; qualitative content analysis
Key Results

Views on financial incentives

- Supportive: 38.4%
- Not supportive: 42.2%
- No opinion: 19.4%

- Not at all effective
- Possibly effective
- Probably effective
- Very effective
### Support - by type of scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most acceptable scheme</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government-funded, reward-only</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government-funded, deposit-based</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace-funded, reward-only</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace-funded, deposit-based</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these schemes (i.e. no support)</td>
<td>41.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results: Qualitative

• 301 responses; supportive (n=47), neutral (n=44) or oppositional (n=210)

Supportive responses
• Possibility incentives could prove effective:
  “It’s worth a try and might make a difference”

Neutral responses
• Conditional endorsement:
  “.the incentive should be non-cash-based. Offer things that have a cash value but can’t be redeemed for cash”
Results: Oppositional responses

• Individual responsibility:
  “I don't think it's taxpayers’ or employees’ responsibility to pay for smokers to quit...”

• Distrust:
  “Some people would just hide the fact they were smoking and say they weren't, to get the money (which would most likely be spent on more smokes)”

  “A lot of people would claim they smoked just to get on the programme to ‘quit’ and be paid”
Results: Oppositional responses

• Coercion:

“People shouldn't be forced or coerced into giving up smoking. You can only do it when you're ready.”

• Inequity:

“..it is unfair on non-smokers. Would they be paid for not smoking?”

“This is unfair on others who are fighting other addictions or losing weight”
Should we pay all smokers to quit?

- Even amongst those who would benefit, support for FIs is modest
- **Very** low support for employer-funded schemes
- More support needed for wider implementation
- Media advocacy and health education could increase understanding of, and support for FIs

Image source: Te Ara Ha Ora
Acknowledgements

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