



Tobacco Excise Taxes: Key Messages

Every tobacco tax campaign must consistently promote messages that will inform and inspire the public and government officials to take action. According to experienced campaigners:

“You must be clear about the message that you want to get across in all speeches you make or media you produce... A successful campaign never moves off its message. Do not get diverted by other issues, especially by opposition attacks.”¹

Successful Tobacco Tax Campaigns Focus on Core Messages

Results of many surveys and voter initiatives reveal broad public support for increasing tobacco taxes. Even with strong public support, there is still a need for public education highlighting the benefits of increasing tobacco taxes. In public opinion research and through dozens of campaigns, several core messages have proven consistently effective:

- **Focus on reducing youth smoking:** *“Increasing tobacco taxes will reduce smoking, especially among kids. Even a slight decrease in youth smoking will save thousands of lives because for every three kids we prevent from becoming regular smokers, a life is saved.”*

Research reveals that the public finds reducing youth smoking to be the most compelling reason to increase the tobacco tax. Even those who are reluctant to believe taxes will reduce smoking rates believe that increasing the tax is worth it if it saves just a few kids from becoming smokers.

Country-specific youth smoking rates and statistics can play an important role in the message (if those figures are available). For example, advocates in the United States often incorporate the number of kids who start smoking everyday into their message: *“4,000 kids try their first cigarette every day. Another 1,000 become daily smokers, and one-third of them will die prematurely as a result. The research is clear that increasing the price of cigarettes through tobacco taxes is one of the most effective ways to reduce youth smoking.”*

- **Increasing the tobacco tax will save lives:** *“Significant cigarette tax increases are proven to reduce smoking and save lives. They make cigarettes too expensive for many kids to buy and give smokers another incentive to quit. The higher the tax, the more lives saved.”*
- **Highlight the support of well-known public health groups:** *“Major public health groups support higher tobacco taxes to keep kids from starting to smoke and help smokers quit. It’s no surprise that the tobacco companies oppose increasing cigarette taxes because they know the result will be fewer customers for their products.”*

Additional Messages for Parliamentarians and other elected officials

Most campaigns must convince politicians to support an increase in tobacco taxes. In addition to demonstrating that increasing the tobacco tax is a public health win that reduces smoking (especially among kids) and saves lives, two other messages are particularly important to deliver to parliamentarians and other elected officials:

- **Increasing tobacco taxes is a fiscal win.** *“Increasing the tobacco tax raises much-needed revenue and reduces smoking-caused health care costs.”*

“Tobacco taxes are reliable source of revenue for governments. Every state that has significantly increased its cigarette tax has enjoyed substantial increases in revenue, even while reducing smoking. Governments can count on tobacco taxes to reduce smoking and provide funding for tobacco prevention, health care and other critical programs.”

- **Increasing tobacco taxes is a political win:** tobacco taxes have the strong support of the public. Polls showing strong support for the tobacco tax increase among the politician’s own constituents can be especially persuasive.

These messages form the basis of communications in most tobacco tax campaigns. They can be stated in different ways to reach different audiences. The effectiveness of these messages has been studied primarily in developed countries, but these messages may be carefully adapted for use in different languages and cultures. However, it is important to consider differences between jurisdictions, and not to assume that these messages will work well everywhere.

¹ The United Nations, *Millennium Campaign: Voices Against Poverty, The Millennium Development Goals Campaigning Toolkit*.