

SOCIO-ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES IN TOBACCO USE

(Organised by the Institute of Public Health in Ireland - 12 June 2018)

BACKGROUND

The policy dialogue was chosen as 2018 is the mid-point of implementation of Ireland's Tobacco Free Ireland strategy. The 2018 State of Tobacco Control in Ireland report created important new insights into the issue of inequalities in smoking. Like many European countries, Ireland has gone through some economic instability over the past decade. The impact of these shifts in critical social determinants of tobacco use is poorly understood. National and international evidence shows that tobacco taxation can drive cessation in low socio-economic groups. However, opinions differ on the expected returns from further significant increases. The impact of major Irish legislative measures (such as the workplace smoking ban, removal of point of sale advertising and introduction of standardized packaging) on inequalities in smoking behaviours remain poorly understood. Stop smoking services and campaigns are increasingly seeking to engage with socially disadvantaged smokers but this is challenging. Partnerships are central to Ireland's approach – a Tobacco Free Partners group meets regularly to share knowledge and input into developments. Ireland's community and voluntary and advocacy sector have supported significant progress on the tobacco inequalities agenda.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the dialogue included identifying and exploring which elements of Tobacco Free Ireland are currently targeted to address socio-economic inequalities in tobacco use; exploring how European partnerships and initiatives could be leveraged in the future to support the reduction of inequalities in tobacco use in Ireland; and identifying which policy and programme actions should be sustained and what new actions should be considered to address inequalities in tobacco use in the future.

CONCLUSIONS AND MAIN ACTION POINTS

Following conclusions were reached by dialogue participants:

- Approaches to addressing inequalities in tobacco use must be effective in targeting and addressing both prevention and smoking cessation;
- Tobacco pricing is central to addressing inequalities in smoking – but not enough on its own;
- Tobacco and social disadvantage is a cross-government agenda and integration in the operation of statutory services may be beneficial;
- Challenging attitudes and norms around tobacco in disadvantaged communities is important but can be challenging;
- Knowledge on what works for disadvantaged groups is evolving but incomplete – this creates difficulties in investment of resources;
- Partnerships are critical to success in the health inequalities component of tobacco control policies and programmes;
- Monitoring and accountability on health inequality dimensions is important;
- Effective advocacy is critical to make progress on inequalities – but some of those most vulnerable to tobacco related harm are under-represented.

Main Action Points:

- Build tobacco into government considerations for equality budgeting.

- Build health inequality dimension into the development of clinical smoking cessation guidelines based on best evidence.
- Enhance efforts to target investment in tobacco control including resourcing for equity-focused smoking cessation and progressive tobacco taxation.
- Greater engagement with disadvantaged groups in particular with people with mental health difficulties.