

Regional Organization Highlights Concern around Maldives' Generational Smoking Ban

WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND, May 18, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Coalition of Asia Pacific Tobacco Harm Reduction Advocates (CAPHRA) has responded to the Maldives' generational smoking ban, acknowledging the public health objectives while encouraging the inclusion of harm reduction strategies in the broader tobacco control framework.

A bill, submitted to the Maldivian Parliament on 29 April 2025, proposed a prohibition on tobacco sales to individuals born on or after 1 January 2007. If enacted, the Maldives would be the first country in the Asia-Pacific region to implement a generational smoking ban. It passed via a vote on 13 May 2025.



The Coalition of Asia Pacific Tobacco Harm Reduction Advocates

CAPHRA noted the ambition behind the legislation and emphasized the importance of considering a range of approaches. The organization expressed concern that restrictions implemented without access to regulated alternatives, such as vaping products—currently

banned in the Maldives—could lead to unintended consequences, including the potential growth of unregulated markets.

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We support evidence-based strategies that aim to reduce smoking and protect public health”

Nancy Loucas

CAPHRA argues that this move could inadvertently push younger generations towards more harmful illicit tobacco products.

"Passing legislation to ban tobacco consumption among younger generations is easy. The

problem lies in enforcing the ban" said Nancy Loucas, CAPHRA Executive Coordinator. Experience in various countries has shown that prohibition cannot curb consumption because it does not eliminate demand. Governments, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), often lack the resources to effectively enforce such bans. This would only lead to increased smuggling, exposing young consumers to more harmful and substandard illicit products."

Loucas suggested New Zealand as a model country. The 2023 New Zealand Health Survey showed a 6.8% daily smoker prevalence, down from 8.6% the previous year and from 16.4% when the survey began in 2011-2012. In 2024, the New Zealand government repealed its law banning tobacco sales

for future generations. In her speech commending the Smokefree Environments and Regulated Products Amendment Bill to the House of Representatives in February 2024, Associate Health Minister Casey Costello noted that reducing supply would not remove demand and could increase desperation. She acknowledged that vaping played a key role as a cessation tool in New Zealand, and emphasized the government's commitment to supports for initiatives to provide people with practical tools and access to alternate products like vaping.

A recent study in the UK also suggests that such a drastic measure negatively impacts small retailers more and have broader implications including long-term job losses, reduced local investment, increased regional disparities, and the expansion of illicit tobacco markets beyond regulatory control.

Such a policy remains untested and can lead to legal questions as such arbitrary distinction of adult individuals violates equal protection and possibly infringes the right to privacy and lawful conduct of business. According to the group, recent data from the Maldives points to an increase in illicit tobacco trade, and youth smoking rates remain a concern.

Loucas added that international case studies, including those from the United Kingdom and New Zealand, highlight the role of regulated harm reduction products in complementing traditional tobacco control strategies. "A balanced policy approach that includes education, cessation support, and access to regulated alternatives may offer better outcomes," she said.

CAPHRA encouraged further engagement with stakeholders, including consumer groups and public health experts, to develop policies aligned with both public health goals and practical implementation.



Nancy Loucas, CAPHRA

"We support evidence-based strategies that aim to reduce smoking and protect public health," Loucas concluded.

N. E. Loucas

Coalition of Asia Pacific Tobacco Harm Reduction Advocates

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