



Health Coalition Aotearoa

Key facts – Smoking and the Smokefree Environments and Regulated Products (Smoked Tobacco) Amendment Act (SERPA)

Tobacco in Aotearoa:

- Tobacco will kill two thirds of its long-term users
- Tobacco use and second-hand smoke causes about 5,000 premature deaths every year, especially through cancer, chronic lung diseases, stroke and heart disease.
- One in four (22.6 per cent) deaths among Māori are attributable to smoking compared to one in eight (12.3%) for non-Māori and non-Pacific people.
- Of the 7-year gap in life expectancy between Māori and non-Māori, 2 years is attributable to higher rates of smoking
- Nicotine is a highly addictive drug (comparable to heroin and cocaine) and makes quitting very difficult

Tobacco Control in Aotearoa

- Aotearoa/New Zealand has had a comprehensive and world-leading tobacco control programme for over 30 years.
- Earlier tobacco control approaches focussed on generic support for individuals to quit – which led to slow, incremental change as well as inequities in smoking prevalence.
- In the mid 2000's Maori health leaders demanded a shift in focus to eliminate the cause of tobacco harm - the tobacco industry and the products they sell
- This led a commitment in 2011 to the National-led Government committing to Smokefree Aotearoa 2025 (less than five per cent of people smoking daily).
- However, it was over a decade before the change in focus to tobacco products was legislated for in The Smokefree Environments and Regulated Products (Smoked Tobacco) Amendment Act (SERPA)

Smoking rates (from 2022-2023 [NZ Health Survey](#))

- 6.8 per cent of adults were daily smokers in 2022/23, down from 8.6 per cent the previous year and 16.4 per cent in 2011/12.
- There are huge inequities in smoking rates by ethnicity: 17.1 per cent for Māori, 6.4 per cent for Pacific peoples, 6.1 per cent European/other and Asian 3.3 per cent.
- Up until 2021-2022 Pacific smoking rates declined slowly, compared to other ethnic groups. The 2022-2023 survey results show a big drop (from 18.1 to 6.4) in smoking rates, but the data should be viewed with caution because of a small sample size.

The Smokefree Environments and Regulated Products (Smoked Tobacco) Amendment Act (SERPA)

- This law's amendments are estimated to save thousands of lives by reducing retail availability of smoked tobacco, making smoked tobacco products non-addictive and ending access to smoked-tobacco products for the next generation

- SERPA was passed in 2022 and came into force on January 1, 2023. Key measures included: a mandate that only very low nicotine (non-addictive) cigarettes can be sold; a reduction in access to tobacco retail outlets by 90 per cent (to 600 licenced retailers); and protection of future generations from smoking (Smokefree Generation).
- Tobacco-control experts around the world hailed the amendments as “world-leading”, with the ability to bring monumental, rapid and equitable declines in smoking.
- [Modelling showed](#) the combined package of measures was estimated to reduce adult smoking prevalence from 31.8 per cent in 2022 to 7.3 per cent in 2025 for Māori, and 11.8 per cent to 2.7 per cent for non-Māori. The 5 per cent smoking prevalence target would be reached in 2026 and 2027 for Māori males and females, respectively.
- [Modelling](#) showed the combined measures would avert the early deaths of 8150 people (2811 among Maori) over 20 years.
- A [study published in the British Medical Journal](#) showed the Smokefree regulations would save \$2.3b (NZD) billion in health system costs over the next 20 years, if fully implemented – and reduce all-cause mortality rates by 22 per cent for women, and nine per cent for men.
- The Act’s measures were designed to accelerate reductions in smoking needed to achieve the Smoke-free 2025 goal (less than 5 per cent of people smoking) – as business-as-usual approaches (cessation/quit services, health promotion campaigns) were not having the required impact – especially for Māori and Pacific peoples.

The Key SERPA measures in more detail:

Denicotisation:

- Currently cigarettes are highly addictive and designed to maintain smoking habits. Currently cigarettes contain high levels of nicotine (8-13mg per gram of tobacco)
- Limiting the maximum amount of nicotine in cigarettes to 0.8mg per gram of tobacco would render them non-addictive. Currently cigarettes contain high levels of nicotine (8-13mg per gram of tobacco).
- This would mean that cigarettes would not satisfy nicotine cravings, prompting people who smoke to quit or switch to less harmful alternatives. It would also mean never smokers would not become addicted to cigarettes
- This is [supported by evidence including randomised controlled trials](#) showed smokers found denicotinised cigarettes less appealing and satisfying and were more likely to make quit attempts and stop smoking.
- This measure was due to come into effect from April 1, 2025

Reduction of tobacco retailers:

- If smoked tobacco products are readily available people are much more likely to use them. This applies to cigarettes that are available in every dairy, gas station and supermarket.
- Reducing availability by 90 per cent makes them much less likely to be used and de-normalises them
- SERPA requires retailers to apply for a license to sell smoked-tobacco products. Retailers who wish to sell smoked tobacco are required to meet security requirements for their premises.

Smoke-free generation:

- This would end sales of smoked-tobacco to anyone born on or after 1 January 2009 and was to come into effect from January 1, 2027.
- The measure is focussed on protecting consumers from [products that may kill them, particularly where those products are addictive](#) – through ending sales to a new generation of customers.
- The measure would stop thousands of young people from becoming addicted to smoking and close the pipeline of “replacement smokers” that tobacco companies need to remain profitable.
- Based on the fact that there is never a safe age to start smoking.

SERPA for Māori

- Since the late 19th century, tobacco companies have actively exploited and promoted commercial tobacco to Indigenous peoples.
- The only way to address health inequities caused by smoking is to effectively end sales of tobacco products.
- Current research predicts that if nothing changes smoking inequities will continue for the foreseeable future
- The SERPA package (denicotinisation of retail tobacco, 95 per cent reduction in the number of tobacco retail outlets and a tobacco-free generation), if implemented in 2023, is forecast to achieve less than 5 per cent smoking prevalence by 2025 for non-Māori and by 2027 for Māori.
- The combined package, compared with business as usual, is estimated to reduce the Māori:non-Māori gap in all-cause mortality of those aged 45+ years old in 2040 by 22.9 per cent.

- The SERPA measures, and in particular mandating very low nicotine cigarettes, will have a profound positive impact on the health of Māori and notably reducing health inequity between Māori and non-Māori.