



Health Coalition Aotearoa

New Zealanders support stronger nicotine regulation

A policy brief for central and local government | May 2026

68%

believe the tobacco industry influences government policy

57%

believe nicotine pouch use among young people would increase

More New Zealanders oppose than support retail sale of nicotine pouches
(46% vs 33%)

55%

support reinstating very low nicotine cigarettes

Key findings from national survey

Where New Zealand stands on nicotine policy

Since the 2023 election, the Government's approach to tobacco control has shifted away from previously legislated smokefree measures.

The repeal of smokefree legislation removed policies including mandated very low nicotine cigarettes, a major reduction in tobacco retail outlets, and a smokefree generation measure. Modelling estimated these measures would save more than 8,000 lives and reduce health system costs by approximately \$2.3 billion over 20 years.

At the same time, policy settings have moved toward expanding access to nicotine products, including proposals to legalise oral nicotine products and reduced excise on heated tobacco products. New Zealand's ranking on the global Tobacco Industry Interference Index has also fallen from 2nd in 2023 to 53rd in 2025.

These developments have occurred despite ongoing public support for stronger nicotine regulation and widespread concern about tobacco industry influence on policymaking.

Overview

New Zealanders are concerned about the tobacco industry's influence and remain sceptical about the benefits of expanding access to new nicotine products.

There is clear majority support for reinstating the very low nicotine cigarette policy, alongside strong concern about the potential impact of oral nicotine products on young people.

Overview

These findings suggest New Zealanders favour stronger nicotine regulation and expect public health policy to prioritise long-term health outcomes and evidence-based decision-making.

Three key findings

1.

Support for expanding access to oral nicotine pouches is limited

Public support for retail availability of oral nicotine products is limited.

- **46%** oppose retail sale of nicotine pouches, compared with **33%** who support it
- **57%** believe youth use of nicotine pouches would increase
- **43%** do not believe these products would help people quit smoking, compared with **34%** who believe they would

Support was higher among younger adults, while opposition increased with age. Opposition outweighed support across political groups.

There is no clear public mandate for expanding access to new nicotine products. Concern about youth uptake is high, and many New Zealanders remain unconvinced these products will reduce smoking at a population level.

2.

Concern about the tobacco industry's influence is widespread

Concern about tobacco industry influence on policymaking is high and evident across voters of all major political parties.

- **68%** believe the tobacco industry influences government regulation

These findings raise broader concerns about the integrity and transparency of public health policymaking.

There is a clear expectation that decisions relating to nicotine products are evidence-based, transparent and focused on protecting long-term public health.

3.

Support for reinstating the very low nicotine cigarette policy is strong

A majority of New Zealanders support reinstating the very low nicotine cigarette policy:

- **55%** support reinstatement, compared with **24%** who oppose it

Support for reinstating the policy was evident across political groups.

There is strong public backing for measures designed to reduce nicotine addiction and prevent future generations from becoming addicted.

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Public confidence in nicotine policy

When two-thirds of New Zealanders believe the tobacco industry influences government regulation, it raises broader concerns about the integrity of public health policymaking.

Public confidence depends on decision-making processes that are transparent, evidence-based and focused on protecting population health rather than commercial interests.

Policy recommendations

Health Coalition Aotearoa recommends a policy approach grounded in evidence and aligned with public expectations to reduce nicotine addiction and protect the future health of New Zealanders.

1. Do not expand retail access to oral nicotine products without robust independent evidence

Given limited public support, strong concern about youth uptake, and limited independent evidence of population-level benefit, retail access should not be expanded unless robust evidence demonstrates these products improve public health outcomes without increasing youth uptake.

2. Reinstate the very low nicotine cigarette policy

Mandating very low nicotine levels in smoked tobacco is one of the most effective and equitable population-level interventions to reduce nicotine addiction and has clear public support.

3. Strengthen regulatory settings across nicotine products

Strengthen pricing, availability and marketing controls, including restoring full excise on heated tobacco products and strengthening vaping regulation to reduce youth access.

4. Strengthen safeguards against tobacco industry influence in policymaking

Introduce stronger transparency and accountability measures, including lobbying regulation, to ensure decisions are guided by independent public health evidence.

5. Reduce inequities and limit the local availability of nicotine products

Given strong concern about youth uptake and support for measures that reduce nicotine addiction, prioritise reducing inequities for Maori and other disproportionately affected communities, including enabling local government and iwi to restrict outlet density, opening hours, and proximity to schools, kura and early childhood centres.

References

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This brief draws on a nationally representative survey of 1,247 New Zealand adults conducted by Talbot Mills Research between 1–14 May 2026. Maximum margin of error $\pm 2.9\%$.