THE UNION ASIA PACIFIC REGION IN 2016

INCREASE IN GRAPHIC HEALTH WARNINGS ON TOBACCO PACKS

Countries across Asia Pacific have made significant progress in implementing and strengthening graphic health warnings.

Myanmar implemented pictorial warnings covering 75 percent of the surface area of tobacco packs, Cambodia has 55 percent coverage, and Philippines has 50 percent. The Ministry of Health Indonesia is working to effectively implement pictorial health warnings; current coverage is 40 percent and it is hoped these will be augmented in the future. The Union works with ministries of health, civil society, professional organisations and partners to promote larger graphic health warnings across the region.

Harrowing images of the health harms caused by tobacco use are proven to encourage users to quit and to discourage non-users from taking up the habit. The World Health Organization’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) includes graphic health warnings as a key measure for reducing tobacco use. It is particularly important for conveying life-saving public health messages to populations with low literacy rates. As such, the WHO FCTC recommended level for implementation is at least 50 percent coverage of the package surface area.

Evidence from countries like Australia shows the profound effects of reforming tobacco packaging. Having introduced plain packaging in Australia, the number of 18 – 24 year-olds who have never smoked has increased by more than 20 percent in just over a decade. Larger graphic health warnings, covering 90 percent of the packet surface were found to be effective in Nepal, where 58 percent of smokers are thinking of quitting, and 55 percent have cut down on the number of cigarettes they smoke.
The Union China office published research demonstrating the 15 FIDELIS (Fund for Innovative DOTS Expansion through Local Initiatives to Stop TB) projects in China contributed to improved case-finding of new smear positive pulmonary TB.

Union-led research was carried out in Viet Nam in a Child Contact screening project, and there was Union-led research into intensive TB cases finding among HIV patients in China’s Yunnan province.

Five articles were published in peer-reviewed journals by Union experts and operational research specialists. These covered topics on childhood TB, MDR-TB, and HIV-TB from countries across the region and were published in Public Health Action, International Journal of Tuberculosis and Lung Disease, among others.

The Union China Office organised a high-level seminar on combating tobacco industry interference and passing a comprehensive smoke-free law, with representatives from the WHO, China CDC and the National Health and Family Planning Commission.

Over 120 health professionals received training through International Management and Development Programme courses in Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, China and Viet Nam.

The Union Asia Pacific Office organised a South East Asia Regional Tobacco Control Leadership Programme in Myanmar, attended by more than 70 senior officials from Myanmar, Cambodia, Nepal, Laos, and Timor-Leste.

The Union Asia Pacific Office, with affiliate Vital Strategies, supported the Data for Health (D4H) Initiative, which works with 18 countries around the world to strengthen civil registration and vital statistics systems.

The Union China Office and China CDC held a high-level tobacco tax seminar, attended by representatives from the Chinese Government, the World Bank and WHO.

The Union supported Cambodia to adopt a national comprehensive tobacco control law, including 55 percent pictorial health warnings on tobacco packs, and a ban of tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship. The Union also supported Indonesia to establish smoke-free environments, and Jakarta provincial government to ban outdoor tobacco advertising.