



Support for Plain and Standardized Tobacco Packaging Regulations in Ontario

What Is the Issue?

Plain and standardized packaging regulations remove graphics, logos and brand colours from tobacco packages and standardize pack shape and size. Plain packs have drab colors and larger health warnings. The Canadian Cancer Society suggests that plain packaging regulations would “1) eliminate promotional aspects of packaging; 2) curb deceptive messages conveyed through packaging; 3) enhance the effectiveness of health warnings; 4) reduce tobacco use.”¹ The Prime Minister of Canada’s November 2015 mandate letter to the Minister of Health called for the introduction of plain packaging in Canada. Regulations are expected to be announced within the current government term.

Key Finding: 87% of adults in Ontario support plain packaging regulations.

Tobacco companies consider plain and standardized packaging regulations to be controversial and have mounted significant opposition to the regulations. For example, the Australian legislation has undergone multiple rounds of litigation, with challenges against the legislation dismissed by the High Court of Australia in 2012 and by a trade tribunal in 2015.

Understanding the level of public support can contribute to policy development and government’s fortitude in moving forward with plain and standardized packaging in Canada.

International Jurisdictions

Plain and standardized packaging of tobacco products was first implemented in Australia in 2012. The Australian legislation standardizes packages by removing branding and trademarks, except for the brand name in a standard font. It also increases the warning size to 75% of the front of the package, 90% of the back and most of one side. Since then, New Zealand, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and France have also passed plain packaging regulations.

Over the last decade, support for plain and standardized packaging has grown globally. In 2007, the International Tobacco Control Survey found that support for plain packaging among smokers varied by country: 38% supported plain packaging in Canada compared to 36% in Australia, 28% in the United Kingdom, and 24% in the US. After the implementation of plain packaging in Australia, support increased to 49% among smokers.² A 2010 survey from Western Australia suggested 51% of the population supported plain packaging with young adults, males, nonsmokers, and people with children under the age of 15 being more likely to support the regulation.³ A 2012 survey showed that 69% of New Zealanders supported plain packaging, with stronger support among nonsmokers and women.⁴ In 2015, a United Kingdom Cancer Research Poll found that 72% of the respondents were in favour of plain packaging.⁵

Method

In 2015, the CAMH Monitor surveyed a representative sample of 1005 Ontario adults (age 18+) to understand support for plain packaging.⁶ Full methods for the survey are available on the [CAMH Monitor Survey website](#). The survey asked the extent to which respondents agreed with the following statement, “To discourage youth and children from smoking, cigarettes should be sold in plain packages”. Response categories were strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree and strongly disagree.

Results

The survey found that 87% of Ontario adults supported plain packaging, including 66% indicating strong support (Table 1). There were no differences in support by age, sex, or region of the province (Table 2). While smokers were less likely to support plain packaging ($p=0.002$), their level of support was still high (74%).

Table 1: Agreement with the statement: “To discourage youth and children from smoking, cigarettes should be sold in plain packages”, Ontario Adults, 2015

Agreement	%	CI
Strongly agree	66	(62,70)
Somewhat agree	21	(17,24)
Somewhat disagree	5	(4,7)
Strongly disagree	8	(6,11)

Source: CAMH Monitor

Table 2: Percentage that Agree (Strongly and Somewhat) with Plain Packages by Age, Sex, Region, and Smoking Status, Ontario Adults, 2015

	%	CI
Sex		
Male	89	(86,91)
Female	85	(80,89)
Age		
18-34	85	(76,91)
35-54	86	(80,90)
55+	89	(86,92)
Region		
Metro	87	(79,92)
Central East	88	(80,93)
Central West	86	(77,91)
West	87	(79,92)
East	86	(78,92)
North	86	(79,91)
Smoking Status		
Current	74	(62,83)
Former	88	(83,92)
Never	87	(85,92)

Note: Smoking status is statistically significant ($p=0.002$)

Source: CAMH Monitor

Conclusions

The elevated levels of support suggest that there is unlikely to be a substantial backlash from the general public against the implementation of plain and standardized packaging regulations. Support for plain and standardized packaging in Ontario is among the highest in the world and that support is broad-based across age, sex, and region. Moreover, support is very high among smokers. This is consistent with research by Swift and colleagues, who suggest that smokers might regret having started smoking and thus be supportive of plain and standardized packaging as a means to prevent young people from starting to smoke. The high level of support found in this survey may be partly due to the description of plain packaging as an intervention aimed to prevent smoking.

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References

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- ⁴ Hoek J, Gendall P, Maubach N, Edwards R. Strong public support for plain packaging of tobacco products. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 2012 Oct;36(5):405-7.
- ⁵ Cancer Research UK. [Cancer Research UK welcomes Government action on standardised cig packs with voter support at a high of nearly three quarters](#). January 21, 2015.
- ⁶ Ialomiteanu AR, Adlaf EM, Mann RE. *CAMH Monitor 2015: Metadata User's eGuide*. Toronto: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health; 2016.