

August 22, 2019

Dr. Kathryn Barnsley
SmokeFree Tasmania

Dear Dr. Barnsley,

I am writing in reference to the Tasmanian government's consideration of raising the legal age to purchase tobacco products to 21 (often referred to as T21), and to address the claims by the tobacco industry and its allies that youth aged 18-20 will simply travel to other jurisdictions in Australia to purchase tobacco. On its face, this argument is absurd, given Tasmania's geography. But the broader question of youth travelling to other jurisdictions to obtain tobacco is worth some analysis.

First, there is no evidence that 18-20-year-olds in a jurisdiction that has enacted T21 routinely travel to other jurisdictions to obtain tobacco. The data from the U.S. suggests that such behavior is negligible. T21 has been enacted in scores of cities, counties and states in the U.S., but perhaps the most illustrative example for our analysis is Needham, Massachusetts, which was among the first adopters of T21, in 2005.

Needham is a small suburb of Boston. If one stands in the center of the town and walks in any direction, they will find themselves in another jurisdiction in less than four km. Most 18-20-year-olds in Needham are highly mobile and have access to a car. None of Needham's neighboring towns enacted T21 for at least a decade, and all have a density of tobacco retailers similar to Needham. There were no other significant differences in tobacco regulation among Needham and its neighbors.

A study published in 2016 found that for the seven years after T21 was enacted the prevalence rate among high school youth dropped from 15% to 12% in 15 neighboring jurisdictions, while in Needham it dropped from 13% to 7%.¹ It is well known that the primary avenue for underage youth to obtain tobacco is through older friends and siblings. Clearly, if 18-20-year-olds had continued to supply tobacco by purchasing in other jurisdictions Needham's relative sharp reduction would not have occurred.

I wish you the best of luck in your endeavors. Tasmania's record of leading the way in ending the tobacco epidemic is known globally, and no doubt the passage of T21 there will inspire others.

Best Regards,



Chris Bostic, J.D.
Deputy Director for Policy

¹ Kessel Schneider S, Buka SL, Dash K, et al Community reductions in youth smoking after raising the minimum tobacco sales age to 21 Tobacco Control 2016;25:355-359.