

Tobacco Control Asia Pacific Monthly Bulletin

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Mock-up cigarette packs with 100% PHW in Nepal

Highlights

Nepal Achieves a Public Health Milestone by Becoming the First Country to Fully Cover Cigarette Packs with Pictorial Health Warnings

Nepal has achieved a significant public health milestone by becoming the first country in the world to mandate 100% pictorial health warnings on the front and back of on all tobacco packaging, set to take effect on August 17, 2025. Endorsed by the Honourable Minister of Health and Population, Mr. Pradip Poudel, this regulation expands existing warnings from 90% to full coverage, further strengthening efforts to reduce tobacco use. This success was made possible through strategic advocacy, strong political commitment, and timely action, with key contributions from Minister Poudel's technical and legal team, Action Nepal, Vital Strategies, Bloomberg Philanthropies, and other partners.

Dr. Tara Singh Bam of Vital Strategies emphasized that tobacco use kills over 75 Nepalis daily and large pictorial warnings have been saving lives since 2011, helping smokers quit regardless of income, language, or literacy. By progressively enlarging warnings and using multiple images, Nepal ensures the policy remains effective. Research shows that previous warnings covering 75% of packaging prompted 58% of smokers to consider quitting, reducing their cigarette consumption significantly. Global health experts have praised Nepal's strong political commitment and leadership in tobacco control, urging other countries to follow in the fight against tobacco-related diseases.

Monitoring tobacco use

Bangladesh: In February 2025, AID Foundation and officials from Natore, Dhamrai, Habiganj, Chuadanga, and Narail municipalities conducted a digital survey to assess the number of tobacco product shops and the prevalence of illegal advertisements. The survey identified the total number of points of sale (POS), the types of illegal advertisements, and shops selling tobacco within 100 meters of educational and healthcare institutions. The findings will be submitted to local authorities, who will use the data to enforce licensing, restrict sales near sensitive areas, and remove illegal advertisements through mobile courts.



The Dhamrai Municipality Administrator and UNO officially launch the survey activities.

Protecting people from tobacco smoke

- **Indonesia:** On 5 February, a high-level meeting was held with the Director of Legal Products at the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Director of the National Centre for Disease Control at the Ministry of Health to secure leadership support for advancing smoke-free policy development and implementation at the subnational level.
- Ciamis Regency and Tasikmalaya City issued circular letters strengthening smoke-free policies and prohibiting the display of tobacco products at points of sale.
- Vital Strategies provided technical support to Majalengka Regency in enacting Smoke-Free Policy No. 6/2024, protecting 1.18 million residents from tobacco exposure in public spaces, workplaces, and transportation. The policy also includes a ban on the display of tobacco products at points of sale.
- More than 600 government officials across West Java Province received training on implementing smoke-free policies in a hybrid event organized by Vital Strategies' grantee No Tobacco Community. The webinar also featured participation from the Ministry of Health and provincial government officials.

Protecting people from tobacco smoke



Smoke-free implementation training in Makassar

Hasanuddin Contact, in partnership with the Makassar Health Office and the Hotel and Restaurant Association, organized a training session on implementing smoke-free policies. The session was attended by 21 managers from hotels, cafes, and shopping malls in Makassar City.

A capacity-building workshop in Depok City trained 80 members of the smoke-free task force, including government officials and business venue managers, to enhance the implementation of smoke-free policies.



Capacity-building workshop in Depok



Monitoring visit in Pontianak

A technical meeting was held for 23 smoke-free coordinators at the Puskesmas level in Pontianak, followed by monitoring visits to 115 venues to assess compliance with smoke-free regulations.

Philippines: The Quezon City Smoke-Free Task Force conducted an enforcement operation, by putting up compliance posters in stores and issuing citation tickets to those caught smoking in public places, in order to strengthen adherence to the city's smoke-free ordinance.



Enforcement operation in Quezon City

- Vital Strategies grantee, Partnerships for Nation Building, Inc. (PNBI), successfully hosted the Youth Camp for a Smoke-Free Generation in La Union province. The camp brought together 103 students from 33 public and private schools across 10 cities and municipalities, in order to strengthen youth advocacy and engagement in tobacco control initiatives.
- Transcend organized two MPOWER sessions in Kabayan and Buguias, Benguet, supporting ordinance revisions to include vape regulations and enhancing local smoke-free enforcement.
- With support from Transcend, the Smoke-Free Task Force in Tuba, Benguet, took action to identify and remove misleading tobacco industry posters claiming cigarette sales are prohibited only to those under 18—directly violating a recently adopted ordinance that raised the minimum sale age to 21.
- On January 24, 2025, the Supreme Secondary Learners Government (SSLG) and Club leaders of Panabo City National High School (PCNHS) led peer awareness sessions for nine Grade 7 sections on the dangers of smoking and vaping. With support from Transcend, these student leaders empowered their peers to make informed health choices and advocate for a smoke-free future.

Offering help to quit tobacco use

- **Cambodia:** NCHP has collaborated with the National Center for Tuberculosis and Leprosy Control (CENAT) to review and refine critical discussion points related to tobacco cessation strategies. Once the updates are finalized, NCHP plans to schedule a follow-up meeting with CENAT to further strengthen their joint initiatives, ensuring improved support for individuals seeking to quit tobacco use and advancing broader public health objectives.
- NCHP has followed up with the Ministry of Health (MOH) on establishing the Quitline. While the MOH digital department supports the system's installation, approval from the technical department is pending due to ongoing technical issues with hotline 115. Meanwhile, NCHP has drafted the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the Quitline to guide its implementation.

Warning about the dangers of tobacco



TC warriors at Public dialogue on standardized packaging

Indonesia: The Indonesia Child Protection Agency (LPAI) engaged 93 children and youth in a public dialogue emphasizing the importance of national policies like standardized packaging. As TC Warriors, these youth advocates challenged industry claims by highlighting the real impact of packaging on smoking behavior, demonstrating their awareness and support for stronger regulations.

- The Muhammadiyah Student Association gathered 1,028 letters and sent them to the President and Minister of Health, advocating for stronger packaging and labeling regulations to prevent youth smoking. The letters urge the government to counter tobacco industry tactics like branding and colorful packaging by enforcing standardized packaging. Vital Strategies and its grantees support these efforts to ensure its inclusion in Ministry of Health regulations.
- Vital Strategies grantee, the Tobacco Control Support Centre (TCSC), held a media briefing featuring expert voices to highlight the need for standardized packaging regulations. The event resulted in 14 media articles, informing both the public and policymakers.

Cambodia: The National Center for Health Promotion (NCHP) and the Office of the Council of Ministers held a second meeting on adoption of the 90% pictorial health warning (PHW) sub-decree, reaching a consensus on its implementation. The Ministry of Health (MOH) and relevant stakeholders have now advanced the sub-decree and submitted it to the Prime Minister for approval.



2nd meeting on adoption of 90% PHW sub-decree

Enforcing bans on tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship



National dialogue exposing tobacco industry's sales outlet misrepresentation

Bangladesh: A national dialogue titled "True Number of Sellers of Tobacco Products in Bangladesh and the Lies of Tobacco Industries" was jointly conducted by Grambangla Unnyaoon Committee, AID Foundation, Bangladesh Anti-Tobacco Alliance. The discussion pointed out that only 2.4% of mobile vendor outlets sell tobacco exclusively, while 18.5% of all outlets sell tobacco alongside other goods. The findings support amending the Tobacco Control Act to ban mobile vendor and retail shack sales without impacting low-income vendors.

On 9 February 2025, during a meeting between AID Foundation, Kasma, the Administrator of Singra Municipality, and the Upazila Chief Executive Officer (UNO), the UNO promised to operate a mobile court to remove illegal tobacco advertisements. Following through on this commitment, a mobile court was conducted on 10 February 2025, imposing fines of 500 taka per shop, totaling 2,000 taka, under the Tobacco Products (Control) Act 2005 (Amendment 2013). The illegal advertisements were subsequently removed and burned.



Burning of illegal tobacco advertisement



Seminar on regulating smoking scenes in films, dramas, and OTT platforms

On February 25, 2025, a seminar on controlling smoking scenes in films, dramas, and OTT (online platform) content to protect youth was conducted in Agargaon. The event was attended by representatives from the Bangladesh Film Archive, the Film Certification Board, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, public health experts, and media. Discussions highlighted the impact of smoking portrayals in visual content and the need for stricter regulations and awareness. Experts shared insights on policy enforcement, industry responsibilities, and strategies to reduce tobacco exposure in entertainment media.

- **Philippines:** Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) personnel inspected the vicinity of 119 schools and 25 public transportation terminals across Metro Manila to assess the sale of tobacco/vapor products, compliance with TAPS regulations, and proper display of No Smoking signage. A total of 1,720 violations were reported to the respective Local Government Units for verification and appropriate action.

Raising taxes on tobacco

- Indonesia:** Vital Strategies provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Health on implementing guidelines for the Tobacco Excise Revenue Sharing Fund (DBH CHT). This support aims to ensure the effective utilization of the DBHCHT fund as a sustainable resource for tobacco control programs. It also aligns with discussions from the December meeting with the Ministry of Finance on optimizing DBH CHT to strengthen smoke-free policy enforcement and enhance smoking cessation efforts nationwide.
- Cambodia:** Twenty-eight representatives from the National Center for Health Promotion, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Economy and Finance attended a workshop in Manila to discuss the transition from the Ad Valorem tax system to a Mixed System for tobacco products. The workshop focused on pricing, the impact of special taxes on health and the economy, and input for the 2024-2028 Special Tax Reform Guidelines. Next steps include preparing relevant documents and studying the effect of tobacco products on tax revenue and public health.

General Tobacco Control



Minister of Health gracing the first NTCC meeting

Cambodia: The Ministry of Health (MOH) held the first National Tobacco Control Committee (NTCC) meeting, chaired by the Minister of Health with 50 participants, to review tobacco control progress and set priorities for 2025. Key actions emphasized include enforcing smoke-free regulations, strengthening inspector capacity, preventing tobacco industry sponsorship, establishing sub-NTCCs, promoting smoking cessation, and monitoring e-cigarette sales. Discussions also focused on requiring all provinces and cities to submit sub-committee names for MOH approval, enforcing fines in coordination with the Ministry of Justice, monitoring cigarette displays at airports and casinos, and prioritizing Smoke-Free initiatives nationwide in 2025.

- NCHP met with the Office of the Council of Ministers to discuss the draft sub-decree on e-cigarettes. The Legal Council proposed two solutions: requesting a Royal Government order for immediate action (or) amending the tobacco control law to include electronic smoking devices and shisha. In response, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport will seek government approval to establish regulations and amend laws to prohibit these devices.
- **Indonesia:** The Indonesian government released the National Mid-Term Development Plan 2025-2029, aiming to reduce youth smoking prevalence (ages 10-21) from 12.4% to 8.4% by 2029. Key interventions include increasing tobacco taxes, simplifying the excise tax structure, restricting advertising, implementing pictorial health warnings, expanding smoke-free policies, and enhancing smoking cessation services with brief advice and pharmaceutical support. Vital Strategies supported the Minister of National Planning and Development by providing global best practices through a series of policy meetings

The Muhammadiyah Tobacco Control Network (MTCN) held a high-level meeting with Prof. Asnawi Abdullah, PhD, Head of the Health Policy Development Agency at the Ministry of Health, to discuss key tobacco control measures. The discussions focused on banning single-stick cigarette sales to curb early smoking initiation, addressing excise bands that currently obscure pictorial health warnings, and increasing tobacco taxes. Dr. Lily S. Sulistyowati from Vital Strategies emphasized the need to prioritize public health and implement standardized cigarette packaging. Prof. Asnawi criticized the low cigarette prices in Indonesia and reaffirmed his commitment to protecting non-smokers and young people through the newly approved Health Ministry Regulation (RPMK).



High level meeting with Head of the Health Policy Development Agency



1.Planning and activation meeting held with the 10 model municipalities

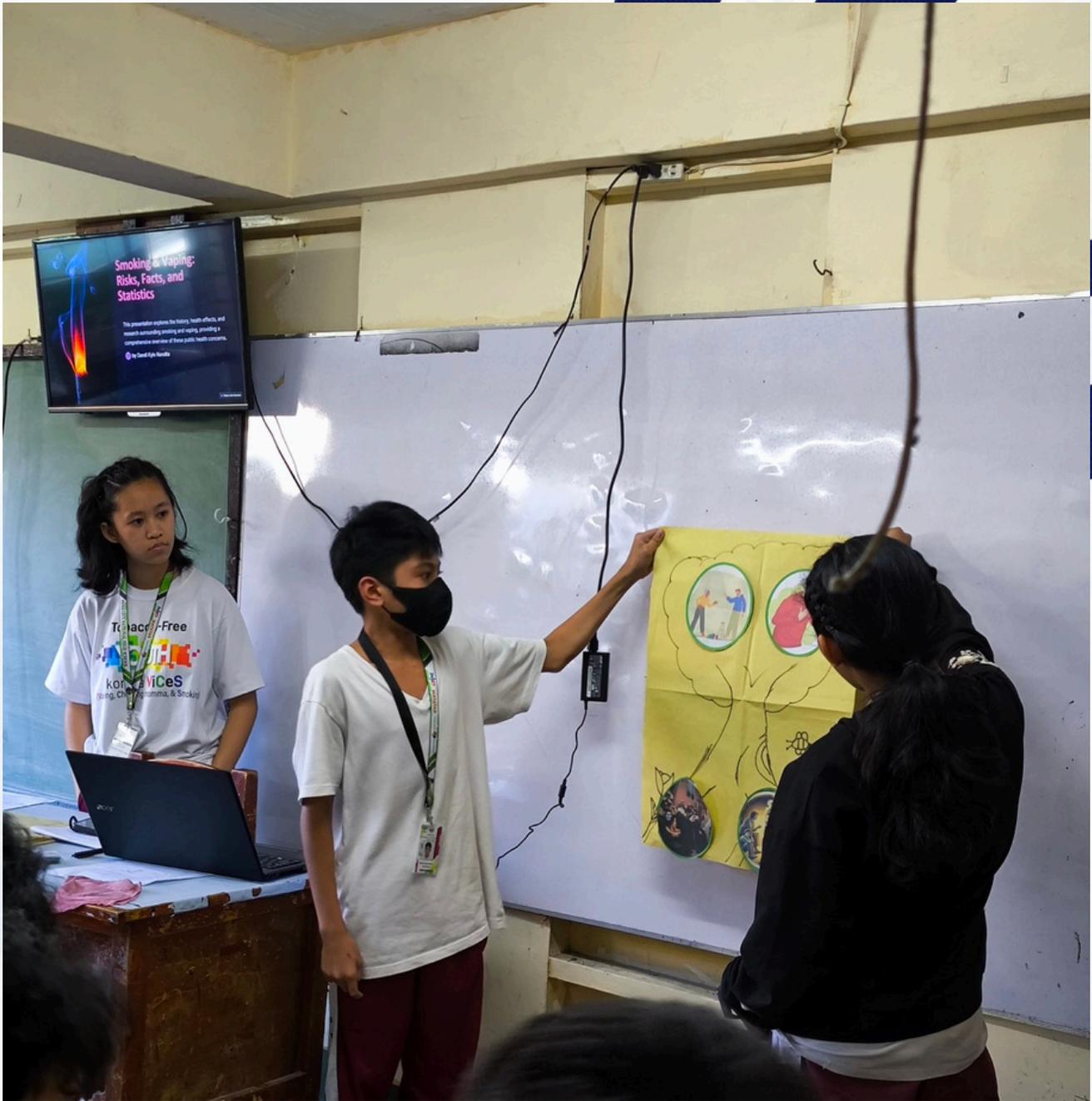
Bangladesh: The AID Foundation held a meeting with municipal administrators, officials, and civil society organizations to develop ten municipalities—Natore, Singra, Dhamrai, Monohardi, Habiganj, Chuadanga, Narail, Jhenaidah, Harinakundu, and Satkhira—as model areas for implementing Local Government Institutions (LGIs) tobacco control guidelines. Newly appointed administrators were briefed on the guidelines, and a detailed action plan was formulated, including a survey completed in February. The next steps involve initiating licensing activities, with budget allocations for tobacco control initiatives confirmed for the upcoming financial year.

On 10 February 2025, the AID Foundation held a meeting with the Chief Executive Officer of Rajshahi City Corporation to discuss the progress of implementing LGI Guidelines for tobacco control. During the discussion, the Chief Executive announced that the City Corporation would immediately commence licensing activities.



Meeting with the Chief Executive Officer of Rajshahi City Corporation

- **Philippines:** Vital Strategies, in partnership with grantee ADOHRE and the Department of Health (DOH), hosted a side event titled “Winning the Battle Against Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) through Open Government Partnerships (OGP)” at the 2025 OGP Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting. The event united government agencies and civil society to promote transparency and collaboration in NCD prevention.
- Vital Strategies and the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (CTFK) hosted the Bloomberg Initiative (BI) Partners Meeting in Iloilo, facilitating strategic discussions to enhance tobacco control efforts in the Philippines.
- Vital Strategies took part in the 2025 Q1 National Technical Working Group on Tobacco Prevention and Control, working alongside government agencies and stakeholders to advance the implementation of new graphic warning labels, COP 11 and FCTC anniversary strategies, as well as tax and illicit trade policies.
- PNBI, in collaboration with Lorma Colleges, conducted the Youth Tobacco Survey in selected secondary schools across La Union province to assess youth tobacco use and guide future tobacco control initiatives.
- **Timor-Leste:** In January, the National Alliance for Tobacco Control, Timor-Leste (ANCT-TL) met with the Ministry of Health to present its 2025 activity plan and discuss its integration into the Ministry’s broader strategy. The meeting also focused on developing a national tobacco control action plan for Timor-Leste, a key indicator of the country’s progress in tobacco control. Additionally, ANCT addressed the need to replace the current Pictorial Health Warning, leading to an agreement to establish a working group for the national action plan. It was also decided to organize a meeting with the Ministry of Health’s Council of Directors to present the findings of the Pictorial Health Warning survey, enabling informed decisions on updating the ineffective images.
- In December, ANCT met with the Mayors of Dili and Ermera to present its 2025–2026 activity plans and discuss the objectives and expected outcomes of the second mayoral meeting scheduled for the second quarter of the year. ANCT also shared concerns about the tobacco industry’s initiative to invest in tobacco farming and products in Timor-Leste, emphasizing its potential harm to public health. Seeking their support, ANCT urged the mayors to advocate for a national policy that prevents such investments, reinforcing efforts to protect public health and strengthen tobacco control measures.



Peer awareness sessions at Panabo City National High School (PCNHS)

For more information, please contact

Vital Strategies Singapore Office

6A SHENTON WAY, #04-01, OUE DOWNTOWN GALLERY,
SINGAPORE 068815