

Tobacco Control Asia Pacific Monthly Bulletin

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Highlights

Myanmar Implements Standardized Packaging to Curb Tobacco Packs' Appeal



Evolution of health warning labelling in Myanmar

Myanmar has steadily strengthened tobacco control since 2012, introducing smokefree regulations in 2014 and pictorial health warnings (PHWs) covering 75% of tobacco packs in 2016. Building on these measures, the Ministry of Health issued the Standardized Packaging Notification in 2021, mandating all packs to be in drab brown color (Pantone 448C) with all logos, branding, and promotional designs prohibited. Only brand and variant names appear, in a standard font and size, alongside PHWs covering 75% of principal display areas (50% pictorial and 25% text), plus additional text warnings on side and top panels.

Despite repeated delays caused by tobacco industry interference, the regulation has now taken full effect with the final deadline in October 2025. Encouragingly, some manufacturers began compliance early, and plain packs were already visible on the market from September. Vital Strategies' long-standing partnership with the Ministry of Health—offering technical expertise, policy guidance, and advocacy support—helped ensure this milestone was achieved.

“Plain packaging reduces the appeal of tobacco, enhances health warnings, and helps prevent youth from starting to smoke,” said Dr. Tara Singh Bam, Regional Director Tobacco Control, Vital Strategies Asia Pacific. “Myanmar’s bold step puts public health first and sets a strong example for the region.”

Tobacco use remains a major health and economic burden, killing about 64,000 people each year and costing Myanmar an estimated MMK 2.62 trillion annually (3.3% of GDP). More than half of adults use tobacco, with high rates among men and youth.

Protecting people from tobacco smoke

Indonesia: In August, technical support was provided to 27 cities and districts to advance policy development, bringing the total to 384 cities and districts that have adopted 100% smoke-free policies covering all public places, workplaces, and public transport. Notably, Sukoharjo and Madiun enacted new smoke-free policies during this period.

In a meeting with the newly elected Governor of Jakarta Dr. Ir. Pramono Anung Wibowo, M,M, Vital Strategies recommended advancing the draft regional regulation on Smoke-Free Areas to align with international best practices, implementing a Governor's Regulation to ban tobacco product displays and advertising at points of sale to protect children and youth, and sustaining and enhancing citywide enforcement of the bans on tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship (TAPS).



Meeting with Governor of Jakarta



Advocacy meeting with Bojonegoro local government

Vital Strategies and its grantee Airlangga University, together with the Ministry of Health, held a meeting with Bojonegoro local government to accelerate smokefree local policy. Local leaders expressed strong commitment and agreed to advance the regulation this year.

On July 29–30, 2025, the Makassar City Health Office trained 50 junior high school students from 10 schools as Smokefree Ambassadors. This initiative aims to strengthen youth leadership in tobacco control by equipping students to act as peer educators, youth advocates, and change agents in promoting and supporting the enforcement of smokefree policies within their school communities.



Smokefree workshop for Makassar youth ambassadors

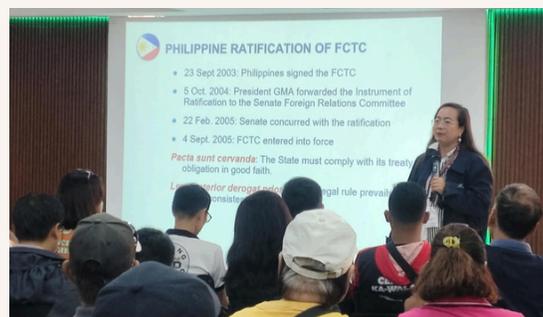


Health education sessions organized in Depok schools

The Depok Health Office organized health education sessions across 15 selected junior and senior high schools, aiming to raise students' awareness about the harmful substances in cigarettes and their effects on health and physical development. In collaboration with local health centers (Puskesmas), CO analyzer screenings were also conducted. Each school engaged 30 students, prioritized either for their risk of smoking initiation or their potential to serve as peer educators in fostering a smoke-free school culture.

- **Bangladesh:** With the technical assistance of Vital Strategies' grantee, AID Foundation, Dhamrai Municipality, Kapasia, Gazipur Upazila Parishad, and Ishwardi, Pabna Upazila Parishad have issued a public notice banning the use and sale of tobacco products within 100 meters of all educational institutions and healthcare centers in their respective upazilas.
- **Philippines:** The North Philippine Union Conference (NPUC) engaged with mayors in Oriental Mindoro and Laguna to strengthen local government commitment to smoke-free environments. The meetings focused on advancing enforcement mechanisms, integrating smoke-free policies into local development plans, and ensuring sustained implementation at the community level.
- Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) conducted a Training of Trainers on the enforcement of Smoke-Free Environment Policies held on July 31–August 1, 2025, in Antipolo City, with 29 participants from 13 LGUs.

The MMDA, supported by Vital Strategies, conducted a Training of Trainers on enforcing Smoke-Free Environment Policies in Caloocan City, training approximately 200 barangay officials to enhance their ability to implement and enforce local smoke-free policies.



ToT for smoke-free enforcers in Caloocan City



City Polices conducting No smoking campaign

Nepal: Kathmandu Metropolitan City has launched a campaign to ban smoking in public places, with city police imposing on-the-spot fines of NPR 500 for violations. The initiative also seeks to raise awareness about the health risks and legal consequences of smoking in shared spaces, promoting more responsible behavior.

- **Cambodia:** Phnom Penh has begun enforcing a smoking ban on the Chaktomuk footpath along Preah Sisowath Street, covering the stretch from Route 94 to Route 240 in Daun Penh district. The ban applies every evening from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m.

Offering help to quit tobacco use

Philippines: The Ateneo School of Government (ASOG), in partnership with the Department of Health (DOH), convened an expert group meeting to advance the development of the National Tobacco Cessation Infrastructure Plan 2030. The session focused on refining key result areas and timelines, and a technical writer was engaged to draft the national plan.



Meeting for the National Tobacco Cessation Infrastructure Plan 2030

- **Cambodia:** The Tobacco or Health Unit and the IEC Units held several meetings to prepare new educational materials. They worked on developing a flipchart for tobacco cessation and drafted a script for a video spot promoting quitting tobacco.

Warning about the dangers of tobacco

- **Indonesia:** Vital Strategies held a high-level meeting with the Acting Director General of Disease Prevention and Control, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, to build strong commitments for the acceleration of standardized packaging implementation on tobacco and vaping products.
- **Nepal:** On August 21, 2025, the National Health Education, Information and Communication Center (NHEICC), Ministry of Health and Population, together with Action Nepal and other partners, held a meeting to review implementation of the new directive requiring 100% pictorial health warnings on all tobacco packs from August 17, 2025. Despite industry-led court challenges, stakeholders reaffirmed their commitment, stressing that public health must prevail over commercial interests. Action Nepal is supporting the NHEICC in strengthening its legal defense, with preparations underway for the next Supreme Court hearing.

Enforcing bans on tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship

- **Indonesia:** The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Trade held a coordination meeting to strengthen collaboration and advance the implementation of regulations on tobacco product sales.
- As part of ongoing advocacy on the Broadcasting Bill, a policy dialogue was held with officials from Commission I of the House of Representatives (DPR RI) and legal experts to underscore the urgency of banning cigarette advertising and promotion through the broadcasting law amendment.



Capacity-building workshop for young journalists

The Muhammadiyah Student Association organized two capacity-building workshops for 25 young journalists, to strengthen their capacity to counter tobacco advertising targeting youth and to build support for a comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship (TAPS) in Indonesia

- **Cambodia:** In response to the Ministry of Health's letter dated July 27, 2025, the Telecommunications Regulator of Cambodia took action to prevent the promotion of e-cigarette advertising on social media. The Regulator found 120 Telegram channels promoting, selling, and distributing e-cigarettes and related products. A formal letter was then sent to Pavel Durov, CEO of Telegram in the United Arab Emirates, requesting the closure of all these channels.

Raising taxes on tobacco

- **Indonesia:** Vital Strategies' grantee, the University of Indonesia, organized a focus group discussion with Ministry of Finance officials on increasing excise tax rates for hand-rolled kretek cigarettes (SKT) as a strategy to reduce tobacco consumption while ensuring sustained state revenue. Additionally, it held a workshop for 9 micro-influencers to strengthen their capacity to advocate for higher tobacco taxes in Indonesia. The participants have since produced several related content pieces.
- Vital Strategies' grantee, Ahmad Dahlan University, held a media briefing to build public support for higher tobacco taxes, resulting in the publication of 12 media articles.

Tobacco industry interferences

Indonesia: Vital Strategies' grantee, the Association of Health Offices Indonesia (ADINKES), is developing a set of ethical guidelines (Code of Conduct) that is being launched in a form of a handbook endorsed by the Ministry of Home Affairs for the prevention of tobacco industry interference for government officials at the subnational level.



Director General of MOFA launched COC at National Coordination Meeting

Bangladesh: The local governments of Dhamrai, Monohardi, Kapasia, Issordi, and Savar Municipalities, with technical support from AID Foundation, have adopted Article 5.3, reinforcing their commitment to protecting public health from tobacco industry interference.

General Tobacco Control

- **Indonesia:** In a meeting with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Vital Strategies recommended establishing a Code of Conduct to prevent tobacco industry interference and ban TAPS in schools, integrating tobacco control into curricula and extracurricular activities, and reviewing Regulation No. 64/2015 on Smoke-Free Areas with stronger inter-ministerial collaboration and compliance monitoring.
- **Philippines:** In August, Vital Strategies' Tobacco Control Division (TCD) and its grantees actively participated in the Department of Health's National Technical Working Group (NTWG) meetings, contributing to the review of the national tobacco control ordinance template, the development of the cessation infrastructure plan, and discussions on the national strategy.
- Transcend facilitated sustainability and MPOWER workshops in Aklan and Benguet, engaging local stakeholders to strengthen tobacco control capacity and align initiatives with national priorities. In addition, the organization provided technical assistance across Iloilo and Benguet provinces to support implementation and sustainability of tobacco control measures.



Online MPOWER training organized by MMDA

On August 22, 2025, the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) organized an online MPOWER training via Zoom. The session was attended by 27 members of Local Tobacco Control Councils representing 14 local government units (LGUs), aimed at strengthening their capacity to implement and enforce comprehensive tobacco control measures.

Cambodia: On August 11–12, Vital Strategies organized a two-day study visit for Cambodian officials to learn from Singapore's success in tobacco control. Singapore, which brought down its smoking prevalence to ~8%, shared its multi-agency approach through presentations from the Ministry of Health, Health Promotion Board, Health Sciences Authority, and National Environment Agency. While the success around Tobacco Control is laudable, Singapore also highlighted drug-laced vapes as a growing threat, with enforcement cases doubling in the past year. The 11 Cambodian representatives from the Ministries of Health, Finance, and Justice concluded the visit by reaffirming their commitment to accelerate tobacco control efforts at home.



Cross learning visit of Cambodian officials to Singapore



Vital Strategies' Dr. Tara Singh Bam with the Governor of Jakarta Dr. Ir. Pramono Anung Wibowo, M,M

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