

April 15th 2024

We write to you as members of the Wales Tobacco Control Alliance, an action group of organisations, charities and professional bodies from across Wales, committed to ending the devastating harms of smoking.

Members of the WTCA endorsing this message are ASH Wales, Cancer Research UK Wales, British Heart Foundation Cymru, Royal College of Physicians Cymru, Royal College of GPs Cymru, Tenovus Cancer Care, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (Wales), BMA Cymru Wales and the Royal College of Midwives Cymru.

In anticipation of the second reading of the Tobacco and Vapes Bill tomorrow, we are calling on you to back the proposal set out by the Prime Minister to create the first smokefree generation, by raising the age of sale for tobacco by one year, every year.

This legislation is wanted and needed by the people of Wales and a survey published at the weekend – [CLICK HERE](#) – shows it is also endorsed by many small businesses here too.

The ASH Wales survey showed that **58%** of small Welsh businesses said they supported legislation to make it illegal for anyone born after 1 January 2009 to be sold tobacco products.

In addition, **86%** of businesses surveyed in Wales said they would support the introduction of Fixed Penalty Notices for retailer breaches of age of sale legislation for vapes and tobacco products.

Earlier polling of the general population by ASH Wales – [CLICK HERE](#) – carried out by YouGov and published in November 2023, showed that **62%** support raising the age of sale of tobacco products.

Despite major progress over the last two decades, smoking continues to kill around 5,600 people a year in Wales alone and will go on doing so for many decades without bold action.

- Tobacco kills two in three of its long-term users
- Tobacco smoking accounts for half the difference in life expectancy between the richest and the poorest in this country. ASH Wales 2023 data shows that people from the most deprived areas in Wales are twice as likely to smoke as those in our least disadvantaged areas (17% vs 8%)
- Tobacco worsens health and wealth inequalities, adding greatly to the burdens on the Welsh NHS and care systems.

Tobacco is an addiction and people need support to stop smoking.

There has recently been a significant review of tobacco policies conducted by Javed Khan, the former Barnardo's UK Chief Executive. He put forward the idea of gradually increasing the smoking age, which has now been taken forward by the UK Government.

We appreciate that this measure presents questions around proportionality and enforcement and hope the answers below reassure you that it is needed, wanted and workable.

Concerns about banning smoking

This is not a ban on smoking for those who can already be legally sold tobacco.

This will simply extend the existing legal obligation not to *sell* tobacco to those who are underage. It will increase the age for sale by one year, every year, from 2027. UK Government modelling estimates that this will avoid up to 115,000 cases of stroke, heart disease, lung cancer and other lung diseases by 2075, saving tens of thousands of lives.

It is a phased approach to ending the sale of a uniquely harmful consumer product which kills two in three of long-term users, when used as intended.

Tobacco is highly addictive and deprives smokers of choice: over four in five smokers became addicted to smoking before they turned 20, most as children, and the majority regret starting smoking.

As the Chief Medical Officer for Wales, Sir Frank Atherton, said at the end of last year: "Wales already has a strong track record of leading the way on protecting the health of the public. However, our Health and Social Care system is already under immense pressure. We need to employ all means to reduce the risk of unhealthy behaviours like smoking.....High use of such products is often less about individual 'choices' and more as a result of the strategies used by large companies who produce, market, distribute, or sell these products."

No young person will be criminalised by this measure.

Tackling vaping

It is not a question of addressing either smoking or youth vaping. We can and should do both.

The recent rise in youth vaping is a real concern and we have welcomed the proposals being consulted on by the UK Government to restrict the availability, branding and marketing of vapes to reduce youth use.

The ASH Wales retailer survey published today shows that **83%** of small Welsh retailers supported keeping vapes behind the counter and the prohibition of advertising and promotion of vapes in shops.

However, smoking continues to be the leading cause of preventable death and disease and will cause countless cases of cancer and tens of thousands of deaths over the next several decades without urgent action.

Conclusion



Raising the age of sale has strong support among the public, politicians and now businesses, with limited and visible opposition largely coming from the tobacco industry and its proxies.

There is also cross-party support, as there have been for successive tobacco control measures, with Labour planning to whip in support of the measure and the Prime Minister leading from the front for the Conservatives.

Welsh Government and UK Government are working closely on this Bill and the people and businesses of Wales need your support to make it happen.

We hope you will show leadership on tobacco control and that we can count on your support for a smokefree generation.

Yours sincerely,

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Gemma Roberts, Senior Policy and Public Relations Manager, British Heart Foundation Cymru

Simon Scheeres, Public Affairs Manager (Wales) Cancer Research UK

Dr Rowena Christmas, Chair, Royal College of GPs Cymru

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