

# State of Evidence Review

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## Point of Sale Promotion of Tobacco Products



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## POS Promotion

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control stipulates a comprehensive ban on tobacco industry advertising, promotion and sponsorship.<sup>1</sup> As countries have restricted conventional methods of tobacco advertising, the tobacco industry has increasingly shifted its focus to promotion of tobacco products at the point of sale (POS).<sup>2,3</sup> The following translational document presents a selection of country case studies and summarizes associated research on POS tobacco promotion, its effects and efforts to regulate the POS environment. Furthermore, it presents guidance on how to use this information in policy development, implementation and enforcement.

### What is POS promotion?

Point of sale (POS) promotion is a variety of activities in the retail environment to increase sales of tobacco products.<sup>4</sup> This could include price discounts, branded product giveaways, tobacco advertising signs, branded functional items and the display of the tobacco products themselves.<sup>4</sup> Targeted marketing (i.e., promoting different products in different socioeconomic areas) increases the power of POS promotion by segmenting customers into groups and tailoring advertising to appeal to them. This market segmentation is based on characteristics such as consumer or potential consumer demographics, product use, location or lifestyle.<sup>5</sup>

### THE PROBLEM: Tobacco industry use of POS promotion

Although practices vary by region, the tobacco industry is typically responsible for retail tobacco promotion, providing “power walls” (rows of packaged tobacco product in excessive quantities commonly visible in the checkout area) to tobacco vendors and assisting with in-store advertising placement.<sup>6</sup> In India and the United States, tobacco manufacturers pay store owners to display advertisements.<sup>7,8</sup> As our example in [Box 1](#) shows, tobacco companies continue to target areas with a high proportion of youth. Other populations targeted by POS promotion include low income and minority groups.<sup>9</sup>

Research indicates that tobacco advertising both encourages initiation among youth and impedes cessation in current tobacco users.<sup>11</sup>

#### Box 1: Point of Sale Advertising of Tobacco Products in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India

The Government of India’s 2003 tobacco control law (The Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act-COTPA) requires, among other things, that:

- The size of sign board outside a retail shop shall not exceed 60 by 45 cm and must have the warning “Tobacco Causes Cancer” or “Tobacco Kills”
- Tobacco product display boards only list the type of tobacco products and have no brand pack photo, brand name or other promotional message and picture and,
- Tobacco products cannot be sold within 100 yards of educational institutions.

In 2010, JHSPH collaborated with the Government of Ahmedabad City in the State of Gujarat to assess compliance with these provisions of the law.<sup>10</sup> The study examined advertising and display of tobacco products, surrogate tobacco advertising and the sale of single tobacco products in areas surrounding 30 randomly selected secondary schools serving students age 13-15. Most (87%) of the schools sampled in this study were found to have tobacco sales within a 100 yard radius and over half had vendors within 100 yards with advertising that violated the stipulations of COTPA 2003. Almost all (98%) of the advertisements contained a brand name, and 56% contained a picture. The study results indicate a significant level of non-compliance with these COTPA provisions and point to the need for the development of new, innovative approaches to increase compliance.

## POS promotion and smoking initiation

The majority of smokers begin smoking before the age of 18, when positive brand associations are established.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, children as young as 3 years old are able to identify tobacco brand logos and understand tobacco advertisements.<sup>13</sup> Children respond most to advertising images, though pack images also communicate tobacco branding effectively.<sup>14</sup>

POS promotion is an effective means to communicate with underage potential and current smokers. Available literature has shown a connection between exposure to tobacco POS promotion and susceptibility to smoking, smoking experimentation, occasional smoking and regular smoking among youth.<sup>9,14-17</sup> In both Canada and the United States, more POS promotion in stores was associated with either a higher proportion of underage shoppers or proximity to an elementary or secondary school.<sup>18-20</sup>

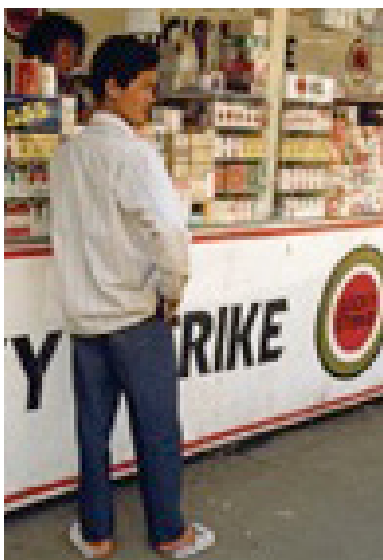
Youth experimenting with tobacco are more likely to have reported seeing tobacco advertisements in stores.<sup>19</sup> In a California study, the odds of smoking increased by 50 percent among youth who visited a grocery, convenience or liquor store at least once a week.<sup>18</sup> In another study, teenage smokers' choice of Marlboro cigarettes was associated with a greater presence of Marlboro branding in-store and a gift with purchase.<sup>21</sup>

## POS promotion and smoking consumption

POS promotions increase consumption of cigarettes by encouraging unplanned purchases of the usual brand.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, POS promotion may decrease a smoker's chances of cessation or encourage former smokers to return to tobacco use by acting as a cue to smoke.<sup>23,24</sup> One-third of smokers who had recently quit reported being tempted to smoke by POS promotions.<sup>22</sup>

## THE SOLUTION: Regulate POS promotion of tobacco products

A number of countries have made good progress in regulating some form of POS promotion. Examples are Australia, Canada, India, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Thailand. A summary of the regulatory provisions in these countries is provided in Table 1. Research in these places has demonstrated that the majority of retailers comply with new POS regulations.<sup>25-28</sup>



**Table 1: Examples of approaches to regulating the point of sale promotion of tobacco products**

Country	
Australia	<p><b>Point of Sale Promotion Prohibitions</b></p> <p>Point of sale advertising is prohibited in selected States including, Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia. A “quit smoking” sign must be displayed.</p> <p><b>Display Restrictions</b></p> <p>Restrictions vary by state, but may include no more than one packet of each product line, only one display area per store, area of the display cannot exceed 4 square meters and must be 2 meters from children’s products, no lights or accents allowed as part of display, display must be behind the counter, not on it, and display of graphic warning signs required.</p> <p><b>Summary of Selected Associated Literature</b></p> <p>Point of sale tobacco product displays have a strong influence on unplanned purchases even if unaccompanied by advertising materials.<sup>22</sup> Policies to remove tobacco products from line of sight at the point of sale are highly likely to impact unplanned purchases.<sup>22</sup></p> <p>Point of sale tobacco advertising has the potential to significantly increase positive brand user imagery and, hence, not only adds to long-term user imagery, but also increases the likelihood of impulse purchasing.<sup>14</sup></p>
Country	
Canada <sup>30</sup>	<p><b>Point of Sale Promotion Prohibitions</b></p> <p>The advertising and promotion of tobacco products is prohibited in stores that are also not allowed to display tobacco products.<sup>30</sup></p> <p><b>Display Restrictions</b></p> <p>Nine of Canada’s 14 provinces and territories have a complete display ban (no visible tobacco products at the point of sale), while four provinces and territories prohibit visible tobacco products if minors have access to the store.<sup>30</sup></p> <p><b>Summary of Selected Associated Literature</b></p> <p>Within a short time period following implementation of a tobacco display ban at the point of sale, vendor compliance was very high across a range of retail stores.<sup>25,26</sup></p>

## Country

India<sup>31</sup>

### Point of Sale Promotion Prohibitions

The Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) 2003 limits tobacco advertising at points of purchase to listing of the tobacco products on sale by their generic names on two prescribed boards carrying health warnings at each retail location.<sup>31</sup> Size of signboard displayed where tobacco products are sold shall not exceed 60 by 45 cm and must have the warning on 20 by 15 cm of the top edge of the board, in black with white background. Tobacco product display boards shall have no brand pack photo, brand name or other promotional message and picture; the Board shall not be backlit or illuminated in any manner.<sup>32</sup>

### Summary of Selected Associated Literature

Within a short time period following implementation of a tobacco display ban at the point of sale, vendor compliance was very high across a range of retail stores.<sup>25,26</sup>

## Country

Ireland<sup>34</sup>

### Point of Sale Promotion Prohibitions

There is a comprehensive ban on tobacco promotion with the exception that point of sale advertising is allowed at shops that sell only tobacco.

### Display Restrictions

Ireland has a complete display ban, including the label, container, wrapper or package used for the product.

### Summary of Selected Associated Literature

A study assessing the level of compliance after the removal of POS displays in Ireland has shown that there was high compliance with the law.<sup>27</sup> These findings suggest that the legislation appears to be contributing positively to the denormalization of smoking among children and providing a more supportive environment for them not to smoke.<sup>27</sup> Also, in this first peer-reviewed study that examined the economic impact on the retail sector of the elimination of point of sale tobacco promotional displays, no statistically significant change in cigarette pack sales was observed up to 1 year after implementation.<sup>27</sup>

## Country

New Zealand<sup>35</sup>

### Point of Sale Promotion Prohibitions

No advertising at the POS is allowed, with the following exceptions: only one price list may be displayed and retailers are allowed to display the name of their business if that name contains words or expressions with “tobacco.”

### Display Restrictions

Displays are limited to a maximum of 100 packs (no more than two packs of the same kind) and 40 cartons, unless the business is a specialist tobacconist. Tobacco products must not be visible from outside. Packaging and sale of tobacco with other products at a single or reduced price is prohibited. Tobacco products may not be displayed on the counter top or similar surfaces. Tobacco products may not be displayed within 1 meter of ‘children’s products.’ If tobacco products are displayed within 2 meters of a cash register, a “smoking kills” sign (at least 100 cm<sup>2</sup>) must be displayed in clear view.

### Summary of Selected Associated Literature

Many of the retailers interviewed in one study had placed tobacco out of sight to improve their store security; they reported reduced vulnerability to retail crime since doing so. In addition, removing displays was neither costly nor inconvenient, and retailers reported that removing displays did not significantly reduce their revenue.<sup>28</sup>

## Country

Thailand<sup>36</sup>

### Point of Sale Promotion Prohibitions

The display of cigarette logos at points of sale is prohibited.<sup>37</sup>

### Display Restrictions

Display of tobacco products at the point of sale is prohibited except at duty-free shops for persons leaving Thailand.<sup>37</sup>

### Summary of Selected Associated Literature

For several years Thailand had seen public demonstrations by youth against convenience stores’ resistance to the Ministry of Health’s restrictions on tobacco point of sale advertising in 2005.<sup>38</sup>

## Country

United Kingdom<sup>39</sup>

### Point of Sale Promotion Prohibitions

Specialist tobacco shops may continue to display tobacco ads (with a health warning) inside the premises of their shops as well as those ads which are permanently fixed to the outside structure of the premises. Beginning April 2015, specialist shops will be prohibited from advertising outside the shop but may continue to display inside.<sup>39</sup>

### Display Restrictions

The display of tobacco products at the point of sale is prohibited in most retail shops. This prohibition will extend to tobacco specialty shops in April 2015.<sup>39</sup>

### Summary of Selected Associated Literature

Research in the UK indicates that noticing cigarette displays is associated with higher levels of smoking susceptibility among youth.<sup>40</sup>



## Best practice approaches to regulating point of sale promotion of tobacco products

Article 13 of the World Health Organization's (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) addresses the importance of regulating tobacco industry efforts to market tobacco products as a key strategy to decrease tobacco use.<sup>1</sup> In an effort to meet their treaty obligations under Article 13 of the WHO FCTC, various countries and local jurisdictions are implementing a range of regulations covering, among other things, point of sale promotion.

Among these provisions, current best practices can be summarized as follows:

- A comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship at the point of sale
- A complete ban on the display of tobacco products at the point of sale

Other restrictions that some jurisdictions have implemented include:

- Display boards shall only list the type of tobacco products and have no brand pack photo, brand name or other promotional message and picture
- Tobacco products must not be displayed in proximity to children's products
- Health warnings are required on displays
- The amount and size of tobacco product that can be displayed are restricted

The idea of requiring “plain” packaging of cigarettes as a mechanism for reducing tobacco product promotion in general is gaining momentum in several countries, most notably in Australia.

**Plain packaging** includes:<sup>41</sup>

- Large health warnings
- Standard package color
- Brand name and variety of cigarette printed in standard font and color
- No brand logos
- Standard package shape and size

## How might we use currently available information about POS to influence policy development and implementation?

Although many countries have implemented tobacco product promotion restrictions at the point of sale, lack of enforcement remains a key impediment to their success. In addition, the industry's systematic targeting of population subgroups and vulnerable populations fosters the socioeconomic and racial/ethnic disparities that characterize tobacco use patterns in many countries.<sup>6</sup> The studies summarized in Box 2 provide useful insights and are practical examples of how this question is being addressed.

## Needs for Further Evidence

The majority of research on the effect of POS promotion has been conducted in high- and middle-income countries. There is still more to learn about how POS marketing restrictions impact smoking behaviors.<sup>6,8</sup> Another gap in current research is that studies have not provided insight into the characteristics of non-compliant retailers and the possible explanations for their continued non-compliance.<sup>25</sup> In addition, “accurate knowledge about the number, type and location of tobacco outlets is essential to monitor tobacco industry activity and to enforce comprehensive marketing restrictions,”<sup>6</sup> information that can be derived from retailer licensing data. Further research could also be conducted regarding the economic impacts of restrictions on tobacco promotion and display at the point of sale.

## Box 2: Mapping Tobacco Point of Sale Advertising

### Guam

In Guam, where tobacco consumption is highest among Chamorro and other Micronesian youth, there are significant disparities in cancer rates and mortality among these populations. A pilot project was conducted in 2011 to map point of sale tobacco advertising in a random sample of tobacco retailers in all of Guam's 19 villages, using a combination of community-based participatory approaches.<sup>42</sup> A community research group comprised of youth and adult volunteers was trained to (1) perform observational surveys using hand-held computers equipped with Geographic Information System (GIS) technology and (2) use Photovoice to digitally document tobacco point of sale advertising. GIS mapping indicated higher densities of point of sale advertising in villages with a larger proportion of Micronesian Islander residents and lower incomes. Photovoice results documented the proximity of tobacco point of sale advertising to children's items and the existence of candy and beef jerky products packaged very similarly to tobacco products. The study results contributed to the introduction of a bill in the Guam Legislature that will prevent the importation and sales of "alternative/emerging tobacco products" and "candy cigarettes" packaged to look like tobacco products.

### Greece

This study<sup>43</sup> aimed to apply standardized GIS methodology to measure the spatial density of tobacco industry advertisements within close proximity to high schools in Heraklion, Greece's fourth largest city. The combination of physical investigation, existing city maps and GPS coordinate systems in this approach validated the accuracy of the quantity and exact geographic position of POS promotion of tobacco. The study was also able to identify that kiosks, which were exempted from the Greek ban on tobacco advertising, in comparison to other POS, were closer and more visible from schools (44.1 percent vs 10.8 percent,  $p=0.001$ ). Although the GIS protocol provides only a cross-sectional snapshot of the current situation, this can be repeated every few months to provide an insight into trends over time.

## Conclusion

Given the evidence of the impact of POS promotion of tobacco products on increased smoking initiation and consumption, regulations restricting tobacco promotion and display at the POS should be as comprehensive as possible. Considering the pervasiveness of tobacco POS promotion, public health messages about the harms of tobacco use may be compromised without the support of a complete POS promotion ban.<sup>20</sup>

Removing tobacco products from sight at retail stores can be surprisingly easy when a government communicates its serious commitment and when the health community is vocal in supporting the policy, despite protests by tobacco company allies.<sup>26</sup>

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