

May 27, 2015

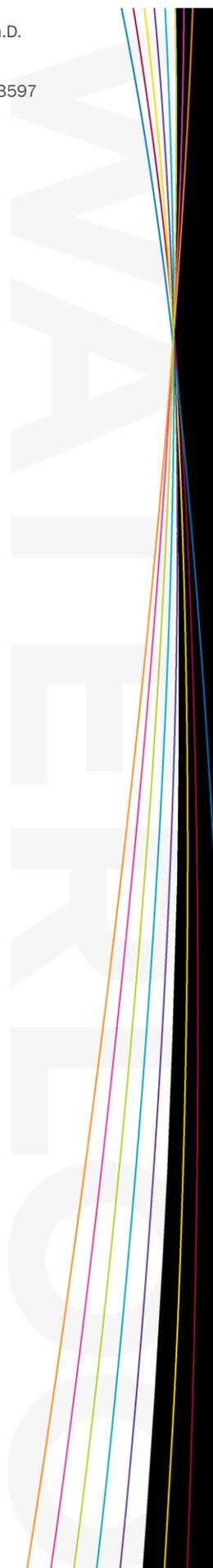
Honourable Shri Jagat Prakash Nadda
Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare
Government of India
New Delhi, India

Dear Minister Nadda:

I am writing to you in my capacity as Founder and Principal Investigator of the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project (The ITC Project) at the University of Waterloo. The ITC Project is conducting surveys of tobacco users and non-users in 22 countries, including India, to evaluate the impact of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which India ratified on 5 February 2014. This letter is in follow up to my January 26, 2015 letter in which I applauded your Ministry's leadership in introducing legislation to increase the size of pictorial warnings to 85% of the front and back of all tobacco products and presented evidence from the ITC Survey in India (called The TCP (Tobacco Control Policy) India Wave 1 Survey) to convey why it is important for India to implement larger warnings on both sides of the pack without delay.

The TCP Survey is a cohort survey of 8000 adult tobacco users and 2400 non-users in India conducted in collaboration with Dr. Prakash Gupta at the Healis-Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health. Dr. Gupta and I are concerned about the impact of delaying the new larger pictorial warnings, particularly in light of TCP India Survey findings which provide evidence of weaknesses in the current warnings. Our TCP Project teams have collaborated in creating the attached fact sheet "*Pictorial Health Warnings in India: Why Larger Warnings Should be Implemented Without Delay*". The intent of the fact sheet is to raise awareness of the weaknesses in the current warnings based on evidence collected in India and ITC data from 21 other countries. Dr. Gupta will be disseminating the fact sheet among MoHFW officials, civil society groups, active oncologists, and the media in a symposium and press conference which will be held on May 27, 2015 at the Tata Memorial Hospital.

Evidence presented in the factsheet clearly shows that the current warnings on India tobacco products are not effective in promoting quitting nor in informing smokers about the range of harms of tobacco. For example, only 49% of smokers in Madhya Pradesh believed that smoking causes heart disease – the lowest level of knowledge of 16 ITC countries and regions. Only 4% of male smokers in Maharashtra said the health warnings made them think about the health risks "a lot" – the lowest percentage of 9 low- and middle-income countries in the ITC Project. ITC research conducted in numerous countries has shown conclusively that larger pictorial warnings are more effective. For example, after Uruguay increased their pictorial warnings from 50% of both sides of the pack to 80% of both sides, there was a significant increase in every indicator of health warning impact. Converging evidence from ITC Projects in Brazil, the UK, and France shows the importance of increasing the size of pictorial warnings on both the front and back of the pack as proposed in Cigarettes and other Tobacco Products (Packaging and Labelling) Amendment Rules, 2014.

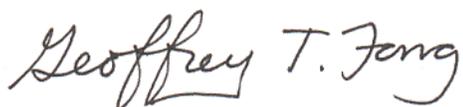


It is often thought that tobacco users do not want more information on the harms of tobacco. However, evidence from the TCP India Survey suggests that Indian tobacco users are ready for stronger pictorial health warnings. On average, 67% of smokers in the four Indian states are supportive of having more health information on cigarette packages, and was as high as 82% of male smokers in Madhya Pradesh.

I urge your Ministry to carefully consider the evidence in the attached fact sheet. Strong implementation and enforcement of the Cigarettes and other Tobacco Products (Packaging and Labelling) Amendment Rules, 2014, as written in the October 15, 2014 legislation is consistent with India's obligations to Article 11 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and would be a major step forward in the fight against tobacco.

I would be pleased to provide further evidence from the TCP India Survey, as well as data from our ITC Surveys in 21 other countries, to support your Ministry in implementing new pictorial warnings on 85% of the front and back of tobacco packages as quickly as possible. Please let me know how I can be of assistance.

Best regards,



Geoffrey T. Fong, Ph.D.
Professor of Psychology, University of Waterloo
Senior Investigator, Ontario Institute for Cancer Research
Prevention Scientist, Canadian Cancer Society Research Institute
Principal Investigator, International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project

cc. Dr. Prakash Gupta, Director, Healis–Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health

