



10 Fitzwilliam Place, Dublin 2, Ireland

## **Irish Medical Organisation (IMO) Contribution to TRIS 2024/0347/IE (Ireland) of the Public Health (Tobacco) (Amendment) Bill 2024 – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024**

The Irish Medical Organisation (IMO) is the representative body for all doctors in Ireland and welcomes the Public Health (Tobacco) (Amendment) Bill 2024 which will raise the legal age to buy cigarettes and other tobacco related products in Ireland from 18 to 21 years.

Smoking is the biggest cause of preventable death, with the latest figures from the HSE showing that up to 6,000 people die in Ireland each year from Tobacco-related illnesses including Lung cancer and other cancers, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and Cardio-vascular Disease.<sup>i</sup>

One in 5 people over the age of 15 smoke in Ireland and smoking remains an issue among young adolescents. In 2019, the European Schools Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs Survey (ESPAD) found that 32% of 15-16 year olds had tried smoking and 14% were current smokers, with 5% smoking daily.<sup>ii</sup> People who start smoking at a young age are more likely to develop nicotine addiction than those who start at a later age and are more likely to become ill or die from smoking.<sup>iii</sup>

The vast majority of smokers take up smoking before the age of 20 and evidence from the US demonstrates that raising the age-of-sale of tobacco products to 21 years has resulted in decreased youth tobacco prevalence and delayed smoking initiation.<sup>iv</sup> The U.S. National Academies of Sciences (formally known as the Institute of Medicine) modelling studies suggests that Tobacco 21 policies have the potential to reduce smoking rates by 25% among this cohort of young people and 15% among 18–20-year-olds.<sup>v</sup>

A recent survey of public opinion found widespread support for Tobacco 21 legislation in Ireland with 71% of those surveyed in favour of increasing the legal age to purchase tobacco to 21 and 83% in favour of phasing out the sale of tobacco products.<sup>vi</sup>

Ireland has led the way before with tobacco legislation introducing the smoke-free workplace legislation in 2004 and introducing standardised packaging in 2018. Ireland has the opportunity to lead again in Europe by increasing the legal age for purchasing tobacco products to 21 years.

Submitted by

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<sup>i</sup>[https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/tobaccocontrol/kf/#:~:text=Tobacco%20use%20is%20the%20leading,\(COPD\)%20and%20heart%20disease](https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/tobaccocontrol/kf/#:~:text=Tobacco%20use%20is%20the%20leading,(COPD)%20and%20heart%20disease).

<sup>ii</sup> Sunday, S. Keogan, S. Hanafin, J. and Clancy, L. (2020) ESPAD 2019 Ireland: Results from the European Schools Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs in Ireland, TFRI, Dublin, ISBN: 978-0-9557528-4-1

<sup>iii</sup> ASH 2024, Young People and Smoking Factsheet <https://ash.org.uk/uploads/Youth-Smoking-Fact-Sheet-2024.pdf?v=1710950114>

<sup>iv</sup> Grigg J, Cox D, Hedman L, Ward B, Starchenko P. Tobacco 21 policies in Europe: a distant future or the next vital step to achieve a tobacco-free generation?. Tobacco Prevention & Cessation. 2023;9(Supplement):A176. <https://doi.org/10.18332/tpc/163046>

<sup>v</sup> Bonnie RJ, Stratton K, Kwan LY, editors. Public health implications of raising the minimum age of legal access to tobacco products. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press; 2015. 23 July 2015. [Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK310412/>]

<sup>vi</sup> Health Service Executive. Bringing the Tobacco Epidemic to an End: Public Views on “Tobacco Endgame” in Ireland. 2022. <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/tobaccocontrol/news/tobacco-endgame-report-2022.pdf>