

Every country in the world can afford to support its smokers to stop

That is the conclusion of a major new review, written by leading world experts and published in the medical journal, *Addiction*. The review examined a wide range of measures that healthcare systems in different countries can adopt to help smokers to stop. It reviewed how effective they are and how much they cost, and offers a new tool to help governments and healthcare administrators calculate the cost – and affordability¹ – of stop smoking treatments.

The main findings of the review were:

- “Cytisine”, a medicine currently only found in a few mostly Eastern European countries, and which has been shown to help smokers stop, would be affordable even in the world’s poorest countries. It is safe and effective and all that is needed is for the medicines regulators to approve it.²
- If all healthcare workers were trained to give brief advice to their patients on stopping smoking, as part of their everyday work, lasting no more than a few minutes, it could save thousands of lives at very little cost.

Tobacco smoking is estimated to kill about 6 million people each year worldwide and this number is rising. Tax increases, advertising bans, smoke-free laws and media campaigns play a crucial role in combating this epidemic. Supporting smokers to stop has so far received less attention in most countries, but is an important additional measure.

Professor Robert West, lead author of the report commented “The death and suffering caused worldwide by tobacco far outstrips anything that terrorists have been able to inflict. Many governments have started to introduce measures – such as increasing taxes and restricting smoking in public places – measures which make smokers want to stop. However few countries are actively supporting smokers to stop. Our report shows that every country in the world could be doing something. The more a country does, the more of their citizens’ lives they will protect.”

Professor Martin Raw, Director of the International Centre for Tobacco Cessation, and a key author of the report said “One of the barriers to countries doing more to offer support has been concern about cost. We highlight several approaches that can be introduced at very low cost, and offer governments a tool to help them select approaches.”

¹ A treatment is defined as ‘affordable’ for a country if the cost of saving a year of life was less than the average economic output of people in that country (per capita GDP).

² The report shows that apart from cytisine and brief advice from a healthcare worker, telephone helplines, text messaging programmes, and books and booklets are effective and globally affordable.

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Notes for editors:

West R, Raw M, McNeill A, Stead L, Aveyard P, Bitton J, Stapleton J, McRobbie H, Pokhrel S, Lester-George A, and Borland R. (2015) Health-care interventions to promote and assist tobacco cessation: A review of efficacy, effectiveness and affordability for use in national guideline development. *Addiction* 110:9, 1388-1403, doi: [10.1111/add.12998](https://doi.org/10.1111/add.12998)