



POLICY TO REJECT TOBACCO RELATED COVID-19 CONTRIBUTIONS

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that efforts to safeguard public health and tobacco control are protected from the commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tobacco use and COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic did not spare any country as the whole world grappled to put in place stringent protocols to protect public health. Smoking is a risk factor for respiratory diseases, making it harder for the body to fight off the coronavirus that primarily attacks the lungs. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), smoking is associated with increased severity of disease and death in hospitalized COVID-19 patients.¹ Hence, smoking, vaping and, waterpipe smoking are discouraged to prevent COVID-19 infection.

The tobacco and vaping industry however continued to produce and market its products – business as usual- during the pandemic. It also opposed stringent tobacco control measures such as tax increase, tried to get cigarettes classified as “essential” during the pandemic, and even sued a government for banning sales of cigarettes during their lock down.²

According to the STOP (stopping organizations and products) project’s monitoring, the tobacco and vaping industry:

- obscured facts about the dangers of smoking with flawed information³ on the benefits of nicotine and vaping.⁴
- stepped-up its corporate image with donations⁵ and with publicity stories about vaccine development.⁶
- accelerated marketing of its products to the youth, placing its brand logos on facial masks flouted by social media influencers.⁷

The tobacco industry is the problem

The tobacco industry has not taken responsibility for the harm its products have caused and continue to cause. It has not withdrawn cigarettes, nor paid compensation for the deaths and diseases caused by tobacco, instead continues to challenge tobacco control measures including taking governments to court. While the tobacco companies’ sponsorship of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is minute in terms of expenses, these serve to whitewash the harms caused by the industry and gain even more through public appreciation and government endorsement.

Tobacco use costs the world \$1.4 trillion every year in health care expenses and productivity losses.⁸ The tobacco industry should be made to pay up during the COVID-19 pandemic. A more efficient way to make the industry pay is to charge it through taxation - either dedicating tobacco taxes or surcharges to address the harms caused, including health care costs, and compensation to victims will help in economic recovery.⁹

What the WHO FCTC says about tobacco industry’s CSR contribution

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) considers tobacco related CSR activities as a form of sponsorship, hence recommends that these activities be denormalized and banned.

While it may be difficult to refuse tangible assistance during difficult times such as the pandemic, CSR handouts cannot replace what the tobacco industry actually owes society for the harm they have caused and continue to cause



Policy: Reject tobacco related COVID-19 contributions

The government should:

- Reject contributions from the tobacco industry during the pandemic, such as donations of personal protective equipment and medical equipment through its so-called CSR activities.
- Reject offers of assistance sponsored by the tobacco industry in any vaccination program for the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Not grant the industry any deferment of tax payments or exemptions because of the pandemic.
- Emphasise in communications that your agency will not make any deals with the tobacco industry and will avoid interactions other than that necessary to regulate the industry and tobacco products.

Sample policy

In compliance with the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, the government of [country] has an explicit policy on engagement with the tobacco industry based on Article 5.3. Interaction with the tobacco industry and related entities are limited to only when strictly necessary for the purpose of control and regulation. The government does not accept or endorse any partnership or any contribution, monetary or otherwise, related to corporate social responsibly activities.

[Attach any existing code of conduct/directive/circular on Article 5.3]

Civil society groups and academic institutions should:

- Reject donations and other charities from the tobacco industry
- Not be a conduit to channel funds and assistance from the tobacco industry

Sample policy

[Name of organization] is committed to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and has an explicit policy of non-engagement with the tobacco industry and those who promote its interests. We do not receive any assistance or support from the tobacco industry nor engage in activities that are aimed to further its interest.

[Name of organization] also disassociates itself from any previous or present statements made by any individual member of staff in regard to supporting the tobacco industry.

For further information: [The role of the WHO FCTC in COVID-19 responses](#)

¹ World Health Organization. Scientific brief: Smoking and COVID-19. June 30, 2020. <https://www.who.int/news-room/commentaries/detail/smoking-and-covid-19>

² The Associated Press. Court upholds South Africa's cigarette sales ban during lockdown. June 27, 2020 <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/court-upholds-south-africas-cigarette-sales-ban-lockdown-71489500>

³ Stopping Tobacco Organizations and Products. Studies That Suggest Smoking And Nicotine Protect Against COVID-19 Are Flawed. April 28, 2020 <https://exposetobacco.org/news/flawed-covid19-studies/>

⁴ Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control. Misleading information about smoking / vaping links to COVID-19. April 27, 2020 <https://ggtc.world/2020/04/27/misleading-information-about-smoking-vaping-links-to-covid-19/>

⁵ Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control. Tobacco industry's COVID donations vs economic cost of tobacco. April 23, 2020 <https://ggtc.world/2020/04/23/tobacco-industrys-covid-donations-vs-economic-cost-of-tobacco/>

⁶ Philip Morris International. Medicago develops a plant-based vaccine for Coronavirus. <https://www.pmi.com/media-center/news/medicagodevelops-a-plant-based-vaccine-for-coronavirus>; British American Tobacco (2020). Potential COVID-19 vaccine-BAT in the news. https://www.bat.com/group/sites/UK__9D9KCY.nsf/vwPagesWebLive/DOBNHBWR

⁷ Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. Big tobacco is exploiting COVID-19 to market its harmful products. https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/media/2020/2020_05_covid-marketing

⁸ STOP. 10 reasons why its time that #tobaccopayup. 2020 https://exposetobacco.org/wp-content/uploads/Infographic_TI_Accountability_Policy_Brief.pdf

⁹ STOP. Tobacco industry accountability and liability: Frequently asked questions. 2020 https://ggtc.world/dmdocuments/TI_Accountability_Policy_Brief.pdf