



Ceylon College of Physicians



Sri Lanka College of Psychiatrists



Sri Lanka College of Pulmonologists



College of Community Physicians of Sri Lanka



Alcohol and Drug Information Centre



Centre for Combating Tobacco

23rd November 2020

Joint Press Release: Raise Tobacco Tax and Save Health AND Economy of Sri Lanka

Tobacco prematurely kills 50% of its users and 20,000 Sri Lankans per year. It is also a major determinant of poverty at individual, household and community levels, contributing to the vicious cycles of under nutrition and lower economic productivity. The World Health Organization (WHO) has clearly indicated an association between tobacco smoking and severe complications from COVID-19, including increasing risk for death. Thus, this is the opportune time for a “people-friendly” government to tighten up tobacco control measures not only to save its citizens from COVID-19, but also to prevent the diverse range of tobacco related health, economic and social adverse effects at individual, household and societal levels.

Raising tobacco tax is one of the six evidence-based strategies recommended under the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), the global treaty to control tobacco, to which Sri Lanka is a party from 2003. Even though it is one of the most under-utilised strategies, as evident in the budget proposals of this year, it is proven over and over again that raising tax is a powerful, effective and win-win strategy for governments because it not only protects its citizens from tobacco, but also increases the government tax revenue. According to a case study on Investments for Tobacco Control by National Authority on Tobacco and Alcohol, FCTC, United Nation’s Development Programme and WHO Country Office for Sri Lanka in 2016, a rational increase of tobacco tax will yield a return-on-investment of 724 by 2030, in other words, each rupee spent in raising tax will yield 724 rupees. A recent study by the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS), found that a science-backed four-staged increase of tobacco tax over the next four years (2020 - 2023) will increase government revenue by LKR 37 Billion, decrease tobacco smoking prevalence to less than 12.5% (from the current 18%) and save at least 141,391 Sri Lankans from premature death.

Therefore, we, advocates of public health and tobacco control in Sri Lanka, plead the Sri Lankan Government to employ an evidence-based rational tax policy, guided by sound health and economic fundamentals, to increase tobacco tax and reduce affordability of cigarettes, protecting our country and its citizens from COVID-19 and premature death.

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