



**PRESS RELEASE**

**World No Tobacco Day 2026**

**“Safeguarding Sri Lanka’s future from tobacco harm requires stronger, more progressive policy action.”**

This year's World No Tobacco Day theme, **“Unmasking the appeal - countering nicotine and tobacco addiction,”** announced by the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, seeks to expose the ways in which the tobacco industry continues to reinvent and repackage its products to attract and trap new generations, particularly children and adolescents, while undermining stronger tobacco control measures worldwide. The tobacco industry increasingly uses “harm reduction” narratives to promote products such as e-cigarettes and vapes as supposedly safer alternatives to smoking. However, these strategies often indirectly encourage tobacco and nicotine use, especially among young people, while helping the industry maintain nicotine addiction among existing users. By presenting e-cigarettes and vapes as modern, reduced-risk products, the tobacco industry attempts to rebuild its image, expand its market, and secure long-term profits through continued dependence on nicotine products.

Tobacco use remains one of the leading preventable causes of death and disease in Sri Lanka. It is responsible for approximately 20,000 preventable deaths each year, placing a considerable burden on the country’s healthcare system. Moreover, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are the leading cause of death worldwide, while accounting for 83% of all deaths in Sri Lanka. Tobacco use has been identified as one of the four main risk factors for NCDs, further intensifying our country’s health burden. The economic impact of smoking is substantial, with Sri Lankans spending around LKR 520 million daily on cigarettes, negatively impacting families by displacing spending on essential needs and pushing households, especially those already vulnerable, into poverty. Furthermore, **cigarette tax revenue in 2019 totaled LKR 92.9 billion**, whereas the **health and economic costs due to smoking amounted to LKR 214 billion**, significantly outweighing the revenue generated from cigarette excise duty (Source: The Case for Investing in WHO FCTC Implementation in Sri Lanka - 2019).

These alarming health and economic consequences underscore the urgent need for stronger and sustained tobacco control measures in Sri Lanka.

**Article 6 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC)** specifically encourages price and tax measures as effective means to reduce the demand for tobacco. Recent evidence further highlights the effectiveness of cigarette taxation as a public health intervention. **Following the 20% increase in cigarette taxes in 2023, cigarette sales declined by 521.5 million sticks, representing an 18% reduction compared to 2022, while government revenue increased by Rs. 7.7 billion** (Source: *Central Bank Data and Statistics*). However, despite significant price and tax increases imposed on many essential goods and services during the period 2024/25, the slower pace of cigarette tax increases in 2025 contributed to a 5% rise in cigarette production within that year, challenging the declining trend in cigarette production that had been successfully maintained over many years.

Moreover, key amendments to the NATA Act, including **the ban on single-stick cigarette sales and introducing plain packaging** have faced nearly eight years of delay, while the **Tobacco-Free Generation (TFG)** policy proposal submitted by the **Sri Lanka Medical Association (SLMA)** in 2025 has not progressed to Cabinet approval despite acceptance by the Ministry of Health. Industry actors continue to influence policy processes through informal lobbying, economic impact narratives, third-party allies, and deceptive messaging that weakens or delay implementation of key policy reforms.

Amidst this situation, **ADIC strongly supports the proposal put forward by the SLMA** to introduce a Tobacco-Free Generation (TFG) policy in Sri Lanka. In May 2025, the SLMA Expert Committee on Tobacco, Alcohol and Illicit Drugs submitted a proposal to the Minister of Health advocating for the establishment of a **“tobacco-free generation” for individuals born after 2010**. Based on principles of human rights, social justice, and ethical responsibility, this progressive policy approach seeks to gradually phase out tobacco use by prohibiting the sale of tobacco products to future generations. The proposed TFG policy represents a bold and forward-looking public health measure that prioritizes the protection of children and young people from preventable harm, while sustaining long-term health, social, and economic benefits for the country.

Given this context, ADIC emphasizes the urgent need for Sri Lanka to advance stronger and more progressive public health safeguards. It calls for the implementation of the following key recommendations to effectively protect future generations from tobacco harm and industry interference and ensure a healthier, safer future for all.

- **Increasing tobacco taxation in line with inflation and income growth.**
- **Introducing a uniform tobacco tax structure.**
- **Effective implementation of the proposed amendments to the NATA Act (ban on single stick cigarette sales and introducing plain packaging).**
- **Implementing the Tobacco-Free Generation policy.**
- **Rejecting and refraining from promoting “harm reduction” narratives in any form within tobacco prevention and control efforts, as such approaches risk normalizing nicotine use and undermining evidence-based public health measures aimed at preventing tobacco use, particularly among children and youth.**
- **Strengthening enforcement and community action against tobacco industry interference.**

On the occasion of **World No Tobacco Day 2026**, the **Alcohol and Drug Information Centre (ADIC)** calls on policymakers, health professionals, civil society, and the public to strengthen Sri Lanka’s commitment to protecting present and future generations from the devastating harms caused by tobacco use.

**Alcohol and Drug Information Centre (ADIC)**