

Toward a progressive law on tobacco products: a turning point in the parliamentary debates

On August 13th, 2019, the Social Security and Health Committee (SSHC) of the Council of States announced a positive change in the drafting of the new Law on tobacco products (LPTab). The revised provisions adopted by the Committee aim at better protecting the youth from the consumption of tobacco and e-cigarettes. The Committee decided to extend to all Switzerland the ban of sale of such products to people under 18 years of age, to strengthen the restrictions on advertisement for such products, including on internet, and to forbid the sponsoring and promotion of such products for activities organized by the Confederation, Cantons and Communes. The new LPTab will also require the disclosure to relevant governmental authorities of expenditures by the tobacco industry on advertising, promotion and sponsorship not yet prohibited. Those changes will fulfil the necessary conditions for Switzerland to ratify the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).

These improvements of the Law on Tobacco Products were adopted with a broad majority and support of representatives of all political parties. Indeed, the protection of the youth and the control of tobacco products and e-cigarettes are not partisan issues, those are human and social issues requiring an evidence-based policy approach. The Swiss School of Public Health can only greet such a move.

Concerning the evidence, it is important to remind that most of smokers start before being 18 years old and the large majority of advertisement and marketing expenses of the tobacco industry aims directly the young people. Nicotine is one of the most addictive substances and tobacco is the killer number one among the avoidable risk factors worldwide. The tobacco industry must replace the numerous smokers who die prematurely by new customers. It has no choice but to target the minors and the youth, as shown by many studies not financed by the industry. This is the right time to stop this strategy that has not changed since the 70'.

This is not only a human and health issue but also an economic necessity. The contribution of the tobacco industry to the Swiss economy, which the industry constantly tries to magnify, remains, regardless any estimation methods, well beneath the costs of tobacco for the Swiss population, whether direct or indirect. An effective law on tobacco products would allow an economy of 600 million Swiss francs for the Swiss social system and it should be remembered that the two main concerns of the Swiss population are its health and the healthcare costs, in particular the healthcare insurance premiums.

For the law to be effective, SSPH+ asks the Parliament to extend the restriction on advertisement at the point of sales and in the cinemas as well as poster advertising. Protecting minors without a broad restriction on advertisement is just not achievable and there is strong evidence to prove that. SSPH+ will continue informing the public and its representatives at the Federal Assembly about the real danger of tobacco.

SSPH+ remains committed to strengthen the control of tobacco products through changes in Swiss laws and policies. The changes brought forth by the SSHC are a fundamental and positive change, but much remains to be done and SSPH+ will continue to operate in order to reduce the consumption of products that threaten the health and economy in Switzerland.

Zurich, 21 August 2019