

*Thursday, 27 November 2014*

## **Youth smoking rates soar two years post plain packs**

British American Tobacco Australia (BATA) today revealed there has been a spike in national and state based smoking rates in young people since the introduction of plain packaging according to government statistics.

BATA spokesperson Scott McIntyre said they were highlighting the recently released government figures in the lead-up to the second anniversary of the failing policy, which has seen a 32 per cent jump in the number of 12 to 17 year olds smoking nationally.

“One of the key objectives of plain packaging outlined by the Australian Government was to reduce the attractiveness and appeal of tobacco products to young people. The government’s own figures appear to show it’s been counterproductive,” Mr McIntyre said.

According to the Australian Government’s National Drug Strategy Household Survey the total number of smokers aged 12 to 17 jumped from 3.8 per cent in 2010 prior to plain packaging, to 5 per cent in 2013 after its introduction.

Last month NSW Government Health reported that smoking rates for 16 to 24 year olds had jumped from 16.4 per cent in 2012 to 17.8 per cent in 2013. Even smoking rates for all ages rose in NSW from 14.7 per cent in 2011 to 16.4 per cent in 2013.

The South Australian Health & Medical Research Institute released figures earlier this year showing that smoking rates for 15 to 29 year olds jumped in 2011 to 2013 from 17.6 per cent to 19.5 per cent. Smoking rates across the board for South Australia show a jump from 16.7 per cent in 2012 to 19.4 per cent in 2013.

Mr McIntyre said plain packaging is a failed experiment which is not reducing youth smoking rates which the former government said it would. Instead it’s caused alarming consequences.

“There’s a third more young people between the ages of 12 to 17 across the country who smoke now that weren’t previously following the introduction of plain packs,” Mr McIntyre said.

“The growth in these national and state based figures bucks a long term trend which has seen a gradual decline in smoking rates for well over a decade.

“Any politician or member of the health lobby who claims that plain packaging has been a success after two full years of the policy is sticking their head in the sand.

“Let me be very clear, our products are for adults over the age of 18. We do not seek or keep any data on under 18 smoking rates. These figures are not from the industry, they are from the government.

“We highlighted to the former government our concerns that youth smoking rates would increase along with a boom in the illegal tobacco market.

“Tobacco smuggled into the country by organised crime gangs has grown to record levels since the introduction of plain packaging. It now makes up over 14 per cent of all tobacco consumed in Australia.

“Obviously those dodgy retailers selling branded packs from Asia and the Middle East aren’t the types of people who’d be asking kids for ID.

“These youth smoking figures must be central to the Australian Government’s formal Post-Implementation Review which has to begin by 1 December 2014. Immediate action on youth smoking rates and the booming illegal tobacco problem is needed.”

**Media contact:** Scott McIntyre on 02 9370 1222 or follow on Twitter @ Scott\_BATA