Lebanon’s first comprehensive tobacco control law sees the light

On August 17, 2011 the Lebanese Parliament approved law number 174 “Tobacco Control and Regulation of Tobacco Products Manufacturing, Packaging, and Advertising”. The law covers all regulations related to the manufacturing, packaging and advertising of tobacco products. The law will be implemented in three stages: Phase one in September 2011 when smoking will be banned in all public places, including public transport vehicles and government offices. The second phase, banning all advertising and promotion, starts in March 2012. The third phase banning all indoor smoking in public places, (including restaurants and cafes and bars without exception for smoking/non-smoking sections), is set to be implemented in September 2012.

The passing of the first comprehensive tobacco control law in Lebanon was an unparalleled achievement. It shows just how strong and effective the partnership between civil society, academicians, advocacy groups, and the public sector can be. It also indicates the commitment of policy-makers to public health in Lebanon. All those involved in pushing for the law, advocating for it, and passing it should be commended and congratulated. Passage of the law, however, although GREAT, is only the FIRST step to protecting public health. We must remain vigilant to ensure its implementation and enforcement and keep this promise for health.

Rima Afifi, PHD
Professor and Associate Dean
Next Steps

In 2003, the World Health Organization (WHO) put forward an international treaty to curb the global epidemic of tobacco use. Dr. J.W. Lee, then WHO General Director, made the following statement: “The success of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) as a tool for public health will depend on the energy and political commitment that countries devote to implementing it in the next few years. The result will be global public health gains for all. The challenge we face is for the treaty to make a difference where it really matters - in countries.”

This statement cannot be truer today as Lebanon faces the big challenge of implementing the new anti-smoking law, approved by Parliament last August. Political determination by the Lebanese government to enforce the articles of this new law is essential to its success. Now that 174 countries have signed the FCTC, there are lessons to be learned from others as to what measures have proven to be effective. It is also time to design a comprehensive national plan if Lebanon is to make progress in curbing this epidemic that has claimed the lives of so many Lebanese. The components that are considered essential in any anti-smoking campaign are: Monitoring tobacco use and prevention policies, Protecting people from tobacco smoke, Offering help to quit tobacco use, Warning about the dangers of tobacco, Enforcing bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, and Raising taxes on tobacco (MPower). The new law addresses three of these six measures. This is undoubtedly a welcome first step for a country that lags behind many others in adopting effective measures to counter the high use of tobacco products. Now that the law has passed, the Ministry of Health has issued the policies (maraseem al-tatbikieh) that will go towards effectively implementing its articles and towards seeking the full support of other government agencies such as the Ministries of Interior, Tourism, Justice, Education and others. There is a need to activate the work of the National Committee on Tobacco Control to address pending issues and matters not covered by the new law, and to lobby for further regulations in full coordination with various branches of government. There is also a critical role to be played by civil society, private sector and businesses, educational institutions, and non-government agencies in promoting the implementation of these laws.

Ghazi Zaatari, MD

Sponsored Seminars

Seminar on “The Alternatives to Tobacco Farming: Addressing Barriers to Public Health Policy”

This seminar was conducted in February 2011 by Mr. Wardie Leppan, Senior Program Specialist at the International Development Research Centre, Canada. It tackled the so-called economic benefits of tobacco production that are being promoted and pushed for by the tobacco industry in order to attract farmers to tobacco farming. The seminar addressed the health impact of e-cigarettes, as the substances found in electronic cigarettes are still not being regulated or studied, which means their effects are not understood.

Seminar on “Electronic Cigarettes: Dangerous Drug Delivery Device or Life-Saving Treatment?”

Held in May 2011 by Professor Thomas Eisenberg, department of Psychology at the Institute for Drug and Alcohol Studies, Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), U.S.A., the seminar addressed the health impact of e-cigarettes, as the substances found in electronic cigarettes are still not being regulated or studied, which means their effects are not understood.

For more information on Electronic cigarettes please check the following references:


Taking from www.bintjbeil.org

Seminar on Translating Science into Effective Tobacco Control Policies: “Three Perspectives”

This seminar held on June 1, 2011, by Professor Richard Daynard professor of Law at Northeastern University School of Law and Professor Greg Connolly Professor from Harvard School of Public Health was organized by AUB-TCRG with the coordination of the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs.

Lobbying with Parliamentarians before the General Assembly Session in August 2011

The General Assembly of the Parliament held a number of legislative sessions to discuss “Tobacco Control Law”. The first point is that the draft bill would only fine the violator who broke the law in a public place and not the owner of that place, this first point related to the importance of enforcing a fine on the owner of any public place who violates the smoking ban, while providing them with examples of countries around the world that had enforced such fines. The second point was related to the importance of putting pictorial warnings on all tobacco products. The draft bill did not have any mandatory article/clause that legally required the tobacco industry to place pictorial health warnings on all tobacco products. Instead, this point appeared as a decree to be agreed upon by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Finance. AUB-TCRG addressed a letter to parliamentarians focusing on two main points. The letter was sent along with a policy brief summarizing the main findings of a study that tested “Pictorial Health Warnings” for the first time in Lebanon. The AUB-TCRG also called for an urgent meeting with the newly appointed Minister of Public Health to discuss how best to make the above mentioned amendments to the current draft bill before it went under voting in the General Assembly. This meeting was attended by the coordinator of AUB-TCRG, the vice-president of Tobacco Free Initiative, the president of IndyACT, and the manager of the National Tobacco Control Program. Many meetings were held with Mr. Ghassan Mohiibeh, a supportive MP and also a lawyer, who successfully introduced a last minute amendment related to penalties. His role was crucial in this process.

Supporting advocacy to move tobacco control policy forward

Workshop on: “Tobacco Control Litigation and Legal Issues”

The AUB-TCRG organized a training workshop for lawyers in May 2011, in collaboration with the “Human Rights Institute”, housed in the Lebanese Bar Association. The workshop aimed at informing and training a group of Lebanese lawyers about effective tobacco control policies, litigation use to advocate for tobacco control, and details of the draft bill being discussed in Parliament. Professor Richard Daynard professor of Law at Northeastern University School of Law, Boston, was the workshop trainer. Professor Daynard stated, “The tobacco industry has many lawyers who threaten legal action against government ministries around the world if they take or even contemplate effective measures to control tobacco consumption, smoke exposure, and the resulting diseases and deaths. Public health groups need lawyers to correct this misconception about the legitimacy of governmental actions, as well as to take affirmative measures to promote tobacco control. These measures include public interest litigation to press government officials to comply with their obligations under existing laws and constitutional principles, as well as under the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and the treaty’s health provisions in various human rights treaties; but also private litigation against tobacco manufacturers by smokers, the families of deceased smokers, and non-smokers exposed to secondhand smoke.”

Dr. Richard Daynard and Maria Elizabeth Zakharia Director of Human Rights Institute

The speakers at West Hall

For more information on Electronic cigarettes please check the following references:

Taken from www.bintjbeil.org

TCRG News Tobacco Control Research Group Tobacco Control Research Group TCRG News issue 2 | January 2012 Tobacco Control Litigation Workshop
Presidential support

In December 2011, Members of the AUB-TCRG visited the Lebanese President, Michel Sleiman, to seek his support for the tobacco control law. The meeting sought to garner the President’s support in issuing the necessary decrees at the Council of Ministers and in supporting implementation and enforcement of the law.

Photograph with President Sleiman

Working with media and civil society

Ongoing Lobbying

During February 2011, the Parliamentarian Committee of Administration and Justice (CAJ) continued to meet and discuss the draft bill, but media leaks indicated that the committee was considering including exemptions for Lebanese restaurants (for waterpipe) and hotel lobbies (for cigarette smoking). A strong position statement was issued by AUB-TCRG, TFI and IndyACT assertively calling for no exemptions or exceptions, on the tobacco control law in Lebanon. The paper listed the four major objectives and articles of the law, and included explanations and clarifications about the new amendments and their consequences. The position statement was disseminated to all parliamentarians involved, especially those who are members of the CAJ, and to the media.

IndyACT focused primarily on insuring that the tobacco industry did not negatively affect the draft legislation by conducting several high media-profile actions in front of parliament and tobacco industry offices, warning industry and parliamentarians that civil society was watching all communication between the two. IndyACT was thus able to stop the tobacco industry from attending the tobacco law discussions taking place in parliament. IndyACT continued to communicate with MPs on the importance of not siding with the tobacco industry, providing examples of how this industry has historically deceived legislators.

IndyACT Action in front of Parliament

World No Tobacco Day 2011

On the occasion of the WNTD 2011, the AUB-TCRG organized a celebration on May 28, 2011, in collaboration with the Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI). The event was organized for students (aged between 12-15 years) from different schools who had already prepared art projects related to “Tobacco Control”. The Minister of Public Health Saleem Sayegh and Maxim Chayya, Lebanon’s foremost adventurer who climbed Mount Everest, attended the event. The projects varied between artistic drawings, songs, and short plays. Posters and stickers about SHS were also distributed to all. The AUB-TCRG set up an experimental activity related to “second-hand smoking” (SHS) with the objective of raising awareness about SHS exposure. Prizes were given for the three best projects.

World No Tobacco Day school performance

Organizers of WNTD event 2011 at AUB

World No Tobacco Day 2011
Research Highlights

Controlling the use of narghile smoking: Testing the impact of a school-based prevention program.

The increasing rate of narghile use by adolescents is perceived to be an epidemic. Narghile smoking causes a variety of short and long-term health consequences. Preventing its use is possible, and will promote youth health. This research evaluates the impact of a prevention program on controlling the use of narghile smoking by 6th and 7th graders in Lebanon and Qatar.

The intervention consists of 8 sessions divided as follows: knowledge (3 sessions: knowledge of health consequences of cigarettes, narghile, and smokeless tobacco), decision-making skills/self-efficacy (2 sessions), refusal skills (how to say no/peer pressure) (2 sessions), media literacy around tobacco & social skills (1 session). To influence group norms, a smoke-free class competition will also be implemented in the last session. The intervention is also implemented during school time (curricular) and pressures (2 sessions), media literacy around tobacco & social skills (2 sessions), refusal skills (how to say no/peer pressure) (2 sessions), media literacy around tobacco & social skills (1 session). To influence group norms, a smoke-free class competition will also be implemented in the last session. The intervention is also implemented during school time (curricular) pressure) (2 sessions), media literacy around tobacco & social skills (2 sessions), refusal skills (how to say no/peer pressure) (2 sessions), media literacy around tobacco & social skills (1 session). To influence group norms, a smoke-free class competition will also be implemented in the last session. The intervention is also implemented during school time (curricular) and to local policy and decision-makers and in academic journals.

Funders: The Qatar National Research Foundation
Investigators: Rima Afifi, Ahmad Al Mulla, Rima Nakkash, Ziyad Mahroud, Al Anoud Al Ansari, Ibrahim Janahi

Generating evidence to support policies for raising taxes on tobacco products in Lebanon

International evidence confirms that increasing taxation on tobacco products is one of the most effective tobacco control strategies. In Lebanon, a cigarette pack costs on average 1.50 USD. To date there have been no studies that address the welfare and public finance effects of raising taxes on tobacco products in Lebanon. The specific objectives are: (1) To estimate the elasticity of demand for tobacco products in order to simulate, for a variety of tax rates, the burden of the tax and the expected revenue from the tax. (2) To estimate the effectiveness of taxation at limiting consumption, for different demographic groups particularly among youth. (3) To disseminate findings to advocate for a policy on raising taxes for tobacco products in Lebanon. To ensure ownership of findings, this research brings in the Ministry of Finance as a collaborator in the research process. The research findings will be disseminated to the media and to local policy and decision-makers and in academic journals.

Funders: International Development Research Centre
Investigators: Rima Nakkash, Jad Chaaban, Nisreen Salti

News

Ras Beirut goes smoke free: A collaboration with the aub neighborhood initiative

In 2007 the American University of Beirut (AUB) launched a new program to reinvigorate the university’s connections to its neighborhood of Ras Beirut. The Neighborhood Initiative encourages AUB faculty and students to work on issues of concern to our neighbors, issues that affect the very vitality, livability and diversity of the district of Beirut just outside the campus walls. The goal is twofold: to help build and protect an attractive, and economically and culturally vibrant neighborhood, and to enrich the core academic mission of AUB through community-engaged research, teaching and service.

In late 2011, AUB’s Tobacco Control Research Group and the Neighborhood Initiative joined forces to launch a new project under the ‘community and well-being’ theme; it offers a prime example of how the Neighborhood Initiative works with AUB faculty and neighbors. The project will assist neighborhood restaurants and cafes to prepare for the smoking ban (Law number 174), to come into effect in September 2012. The AUB team plans to reach out to neighborhood restaurants to help them make the switch to smoke-free as smooth as possible. Following a thorough mapping and interviews with neighboring businesses, the team will develop in participation with the neighborhood restaurant owners printed materials such as brochures, stickers and non-smoking signs; train restaurant managers and waiters on dealing with difficult customers; and organize a neighborhood celebration event on the first smoke-free day. This event will take place simultaneously in participating neighborhood restaurants, with roving musical groups, free food, student volunteers distributing information about the law and the dangers of smoking, and other surprises. The rationale of the project is to give Ras Beirut restaurants a special identity and unity, an edge in the smoke-free movement, and make going smoke-free a trendy and fun move.

Other News

1- The first international meeting on waterpipe tobacco smoking: building evidence for intervention and policy 2012/2013.

2- AUB-TCRG and the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs are working on publishing a policy series on Tobacco Control, expected in March 2012.

3- On the occasion of World No Tobacco Day 2012, AUB-TCRG is organizing a regional workshop for NGO’s that focuses on monitoring tobacco industry interference and tobacco control policy implementation.

4-AUB-TCRG members will be attending the World Conference on Tobacco or Health in March 2012 to in Singapore. Here are some of the titles that will be presented:

- How do youth evaluate effectiveness of pictorial health warnings on cigarette packs?
- One pack for one USD: raising cigarette taxation in Lebanon
- A smoke free university campus in a “smoke’s paradise: Lessons learned
- Challenges to recruitment and parental consent for child participation in a school-based waterpipe tobacco smoking prevention program in Qatar
- Testing the impact of a school-based waterpipe use prevention program in Qatar: Results of a pilot test
TheMissionof AUB-TCRG is to promote public health by producing and disseminating evidence-based tobacco control research.

Objectives

At the international level:
- Generate new knowledge in multiple fields related to tobacco use and control

At the regional level:
- Share research findings and successes in tobacco control across countries
- Facilitate networking and communication among tobacco control researchers and civil society in the region
- Support research collaboration

At the national level:
- Disseminate research findings in a user-friendly way to the public
- Transfer evidence of best practices in tobacco control legislation to policy and decision makers
- Build the capacity of civil society to implement and evaluate interventions in promoting tobacco control
- Advocate for the implementation of strong tobacco control policies in Lebanon

Affiliations/ Faculties

Faculty of Health Sciences
- Center for Research on Population and Health
- Department of Health Promotion and Community Health
- Department of Epidemiology and Population Health

Faculty of Medicine
- Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine
- Department of Internal Medicine
- School of Nursing

Faculty of Engineering and Architecture
- Aerosol Research Laboratory
- Department of Mechanical Engineering

Faculty of Arts and Sciences
- Department of Chemistry
- Department of Economics

Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences
- Department of Agricultural Sciences

Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs

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