Mental health and tobacco endgame strategy support in South Australia

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Introduction and Aims: Australians with mental illness have 1.5 times the tobacco-related disease burden of those without mental illness. Increased smoking prevalence with mental illness severity reinforces this health disparity. Tobacco endgame strategies are policy tobacco control interventions to decrease smoking prevalence. This study examined support for five tobacco endgame strategies by people with mental illness and different mental health characteristics in South Australia.

Method/Approach: South Australians aged ≥15 years completed the SA Health Population Health Survey Module System telephone survey (2021). Smoking status and mental health treatment, psychiatric pension, and symptom status (PHQ-4) were recorded. Support for five endgame strategies was assessed: taxing nicotine products, reducing retail availability, ending sales in licensed venues, restricting points of sale, and reducing product nicotine levels. This study is in progress, preliminary results follow.

Results: Of 3006 participants (M±SD=47.3±18.8 years), 16.9% lived with a mental health condition (treatment or pension), and 12.4% were current smokers. More smokers than non-smokers lived with mental illness (26.1% vs 15.6%, p<.001), depression (22.0% vs 10.7%, p<.001) and anxiety (28.0% vs 16.6%, p<.001). Participants with a mental health condition, compared to those not indicating one, less often supported product tax (62.4% vs 69.0%, p=.053), and reducing retail availability (68.4% vs 71.3%, p=.022). Smaller differences were seen for ending sales in alcohol venues, restricting sales points, and reducing nicotine content.

Discussions and Conclusions: Tobacco endgame strategies using increased product tax and reduced retail availability were less supported by South Australians with mental illness. Comparable support for remaining strategies suggests that ending sales in licensed venues, restricting sales points, and reducing nicotine may be more equitable approaches in South Australia.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Tobacco control policy focused on increased product tax and reduced retail availability should consider potential disproportionate impacts on people with mental illness.

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