The Impact on Quitlines When Graphic Warning Labels include a Quitline Number

NORTH AMERICAN QUITLINE CONSORTIUM | The Global QUITLINE Network
Bringing quitlines together to support the exchange of ideas and solutions to strengthen the quality of quitline services worldwide.

| CASE STUDY: LESSONS FROM AUSTRALIA |

INTRODUCTION

The evidence that graphic warning labels (GWLs) on tobacco products can and do inform smokers about the risks of smoking, encourage smokers to quit and prevent nonsmokers from starting to smoke is extensive. The International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project (ITC) is an international cohort study that consists of surveys of adult smokers in nineteen countries and focuses on tobacco control policy evaluation. According to ITC research on tobacco warning labels, adult and youth smokers report that large, comprehensive warning labels reduce smoking consumption, increase motivation to quit and increase the likelihood that they will remain abstinent following a quit attempt.[1]

As of August 2012, 56 countries in the Americas, Eastern Mediterranean, Europe, South-East Asia and Western Pacific regions require pictures or images on cigarette packs (some of these are still being implemented).[2] A European Union directive gives its 27 member countries the option of adding pictures to warnings as a way to educate smokers about the risks of continuing to smoke.[3] GWLs on tobacco packaging in countries like Canada, Australia and New Zealand include concrete information on ways to quit such as quitline numbers and website addresses and their experiences to-date indicate that including cessation resources on the label are an effective way to encourage tobacco users to quit. In fact, approximately 20 nations currently require a quitline number on their tobacco package labeling, including Finland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Iceland, Malta, the U.K., France, Sweden, Hungary, Poland, Germany, Belgium, South Africa, Brazil, Singapore, Australia, Switzerland, New Zealand and Norway.[4]

> To access resources to support adoption and implementation of GWLs on tobacco packaging, including the importance of including a quitline number as part of the warning label, visit the Global Quitline Network here:
> http://globalqlnetwork.wordpress.com/tools-and-resources-for-quitlines/strengthening-policy/tobacco-package-health-warnings/
>
> To learn more about GWLs by country visit: http://www.tobaccolabels.ca/

While the evidence on the impact of GWLs is clear and the evidence for the effectiveness of the inclusion of a quitline number on warning labels growing, less is known about the impact of enhanced GWLs on quitline operations when labels first begin to include a quitline number. *What is the immediate impact on call volume when these labels are first announced and how are spikes in volume best addressed operationally? Does volume become increasingly steady over time? Do the types of callers to the quitline change as a result and hence, counseling protocols?* In an attempt to answer these and other questions related to implementation and impact of GWLs that include a quitline number, this case study focuses on one country and their experiences in four areas:

- *Preparing for implementation*
- *Promoting the new warning labels*
- *Impact on quitline service delivery and utilization*
- *Evaluation of outcomes*

The purpose of this case study is to describe implementation of warning labels that include a quitline number within a real-world quitline setting, noting the programmatic and operational issues that emerged and how they were addressed. Our aim is to provide quitline service providers and quitline funders with valuable information to support successful preparation and implementation. Let's begin with important background on tobacco control efforts in Australia…

OVERVIEW OF TOBACCO CONTROL IN AUSTRALIA

The Australian National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) shows that in 2010,
15.1% of Australians aged 14 years or older were daily smokers, declining from 16.6% in 2007 and from 24.3% in 1991.[5] Clearly, Australia's four-decades long emphasis on population-based approaches to reducing smoking prevalence have been successful:

- *mass media campaigns;*
- *cessation services, including quitlines and online cessation services;*
- *health warnings on packaging;*
- *prohibitions on tobacco advertising;*
- *price increases; and*
- *controls on environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) and access to tobacco products.*

This sustained effort has reduced Australian smoking rates to a level now among the lowest in the world.

Quitline Australia

Quitline services in Australia are funded by State and Territory governments while tobacco packaging regulations, inclusions of graphic health warnings and the inclusion of the quitline number on packaging is legislated by the Commonwealth.[6] All quitlines use the same national quitline portal numbers and calls are automatically routed to the State or Territory from which they originate. One quitline number appears on packaging and one number is used for all other promotion. The dual numbers allow for monitoring of the full impact of warning labels that include the quitline number. The national portal is overseen by Quit Victoria and is provided by a major telecommunications service provider. Currently, the Australian Capital Territory is the only jurisdiction that does not support its own quitline service, as their service is outsourced to New South Wales.

While the technology and the type of organization within which the quitline operates differs across each jurisdiction, there is a minimum standard quitline protocol agreed upon across all of the States and Territories. All services operate to an agreed set of national minimum standards for such things as the range of services provided, response times for calls, data collection, and the training and qualifications of counselors. There are also agreed protocols for supporting callers with special needs such as pregnant smokers, those with mental illness, young people and those from Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. In 2007, there were 117,174 calls to the quitline throughout Australia, almost all of which were related to smoking cessation.[7]

History of Tobacco Warning Labels in Australia

From 1973 to 1994 warning labels on tobacco products in Australia were required through separate legislation in each State and Territory. It was not until January of 1995 that a Commonwealth-introduced system of strengthened warning labels on tobacco product packaging took effect under the Trade Practices (Consumer Product Information Standards) (Tobacco) Regulations 1994. The regulations required six rotating text-based warning labels on the top 25% of the front of the pack and detailed health information on the top 33% of the back of the pack. Additionally, a national information telephone number appeared on the back of packs that provided callers with recorded information about the health effects of tobacco use (this was not a quitline number).

The Trade Practices (Consumer Product Information Standards) (Tobacco) Regulations 2004 took full effect on March 1, 2006 which required GWLs on most tobacco product packaging. The 2006 warnings covered 30% of the front and 90% of the back of cigarette packs and cartons, with graphics appearing on both the front and back of packs. The warnings covered 30% of the front and 50% of the back of most loose tobacco and pipe tobacco pouches, with graphics appearing on both the front and back of packs. Most importantly, the Australian Quitline number began appearing on GWLs with the message "You CAN quit smoking. Call the Quitline 131 848, talk to your doctor or pharmacist, or visit www.quitnow.info.au." The Quitline number is also "stamped" on top of the graphic image on the backs of packs. There are 14 different warnings divided into two sets, and these are rotated semi-annually.[8]

On December 1, 2011, Australia became the first country in the world to introduce plain packaging legislation when the *Tobacco Plain Packaging Act 2011* and the *Trade Marks Amendment (Tobacco Plain Packaging) Act 2011* received Royal Assent. Under these new laws, tobacco industry logos, colors and promotional text are banned. Olive green is the standard packaging background color. There are also requirements for larger and updated graphic warning labels (e.g., from

30% of the front of the packs to 75%). There is a one year transition period and the new regulations must be fully implemented by December 1, 2012.

To view additional warning labels for Australia visit http://www.tobaccolabels.ca/packimages/country/australia.

PREPARING FOR IMPLEMENTATION

All quitlines in Australia are funded through local jurisdictions, with some funding available from the Commonwealth Government for specific activities. There was no additional funding provided by the Commonwealth to support additional capacity required to meet anticipated increases in call demand as a result of enhanced GWLs. Increased demand was absorbed within existing capacity. More recently, in preparing for the implementation of plain packaging in Australia, no additional funding was provided. Although increased services demand was experienced, this was able to be managed within existing staffing capacity.

Key Message from Quit Victoria
"If staffing levels are to remain similar, then develop a "short call" protocol and train staff to this protocol prior to the introduction of enhanced GWLs. Critical elements for the "short call" protocol are: explaining to the caller that the quitline is experiencing a period of high demand, and that staff are working to provide service to as many callers as possible, and then providing fast-track motivational counseling, personalized advice and scheduling a callback. Moving to a short call protocol can help alleviate counselors' fear that they will "short change" callers who are trying to quit during this time." -Luke Atkin, Quit Victoria

PROMOTING THE NEW WARNING LABEL

The Australian Government developed and supported a series of mass media-based awareness raising campaigns in February 2006 to accompany the introduction of the enhanced GWLs.[7] Australian state and territory-based non-government health agencies also implemented campaigns to reinforce the new warnings and to promote quitting. The mass media campaign featured two television commercials that were linked directly to the new graphic warnings appearing on packaging. With the recent implementation of plain packaging, there has been quite a bit of unpaid media activity but no television/social marketing campaigns. Cancer Council Victoria has developed web-based information on the new packaging that can be found at http://www.cancervic.org.au/plainfacts/.

Key Message from Quit Victoria
"We were surprised by the time it took for packs with enhanced GWLs to appear on the market. At the time we were unaware of the maximization of production and stockpiling by the tobacco companies. We expected packs to appear gradually but it was quite sudden after the stockpile was exhausted." - Luke Atkin, Quit Victoria

IMPACT ON SERVICE DELIVERY AND UTILIZATION

For a range of historical reasons each jurisdiction had slightly different arrangements for answering calls in 2006. For answering all calls in the first instance, five jurisdictions subscribed to a call-center based telephone answering service, one answered all calls in its own quit campaign office, one used counselors employed by Alcohol and Drug Information Services (ADIS), and one State

used a recorded interactive voicemail system. Despite the differences, quitlines across the country experienced similar percentages of call volume increases and had similar experiences as a result of the increased volume due to enhanced GWLs.[6]

Changes in call volumes were seen slightly prior to the implementation of the enhanced GWLs appearing on packs, due perhaps to unpaid media activity around implementation. Similar surges in volume have also been experienced as a result of tax increases and plain packaging initiatives.[6] There were twice as many calls to Australian quitlines in 2006 as there were in each of the preceding two years.[8]

The table below shows the total number of calls for all Australian Quitlines from May 2005 to April 2006.

Table 1: Call Volume by Type of Quitline Promotion, May 2005 – April 2006
Data provided by Luke Atkin, Quit Victoria

Total calls to Quitline	May-05	Jun-05	Jul-05	Aug-05	Sep-05	Oct-05	Nov-05	Dec-05	Jan-06	Feb-06	Mar-06	Apr-06
137-848* and 131-848*	9423	7864	5465	5165	5359	4567	4409	5024	12653	9513	10658	6420
137-848* only	310	472	435	1236	2109	884	2237	3172	3495	2343	2737	3437
131-848* only	9113	7392	5030	3929	3256	3683	2172	1852	9158	7170	7921	2983

*Note: The number displayed on tobacco packs is 131-848 and 137-848 is used in all other promotion.

At the time of enhanced GWL implementation, individual jurisdictions were responsible for promoting their own services. As a result, it may be true that the levels of awareness of the service varied among the jurisdictions. During the years leading up to 2006 and immediately after implementation of the new labels, social marketing efforts related to promoting and building awareness of the quitline were high. A recent review of the quitline brand demonstrated that there was high level of recognition of the brand and the service provided amongst smokers in Australia.[6] Social marketing efforts have tapered off over time.

It is important to note that all Australian quitlines adhere to an agreed upon set of minimum standards related to operating times, call handling protocols and service offerings, however there is variation within each model. When peaks in call demand are experienced, all quitlines are required to adopt a short registration and counseling service. This decision was, and continues to be, managed by each jurisdictional Quitline Manager and host organization. The registration and counseling processes for all quitlines are then adapted to a "short call" protocol to enable increased call handling. The "short call" protocol is a streamlined intake call that progresses to active counseling and is completed in an average of 10 minutes. The "short call" protocol was implemented by individual Quitlines, and periods of adoption of the short call protocol fluctuated in response to individual services experiencing spikes in call volume resulting from implementation of the enhanced GWLs. Quitlines however did not make changes to intake data gathered from callers during this period. In addition to efficiencies in the intake call, the number of attempts made to contact a caller was also reduced. If quitline staff were able to leave a message inviting the caller to contact the quitline again, they did.

Key Message from Quit Victoria
"We informed callers at the point of contact that there was a high demand for quitline services and as a result calls may be shorter and that response times would be longer. This was helpful to us in crafting reasonable expectations among callers." - Luke Atkin, Quit Victoria

EVALUATING LONG-TERM OUTCOMES
The surge in quitline call volume resulting from enhanced GWL implementation lasted approximately four months and then plateaued.[6] Longer-term evaluation of the impact of enhanced GWLs in Australia has been captured in various research studies. For instance, call volume in one study was monitored over four years – two years before and after the new packaging was introduced – in order to measure the effects of the enhanced GWLs on calls to the Australian Quitline. Authors found that there were twice as many calls to the Quitline in 2006 (the year of introduction), as there were in each of the preceding 2 years.[8] While call volume tapered back in 2007, it remained at a level higher than before the introduction of enhanced GWLs.[8] The results of this study are informative to countries preparing for implementation of enhanced GWLs in projecting longer-term impacts to call volume and budgets.

In a study that explored the impact of Australia's enhanced GWLs on smokers' beliefs about smoking-related illnesses, authors found that unprompted recall of new graphic cigarette warnings was high in the months following their introduction, demonstrating that smokers had been exposed to them. Smokers also demonstrated an increase in awareness about smoking-related diseases specific to the warning messages.[9] Surveys conducted in Victoria approximately six months after the introduction of the enhanced GWLs found that not only are enhanced labels noticed by the majority of adolescents but they increase their cognitive processing of the messages and have the potential to lower smoking intentions.[10] Clearly, enhanced GWLs in Australia were successful in encouraging utilization of the quitline and educating the public, both smokers and non-smokers, about the health consequences of tobacco use.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Real progress has been made in reducing smoking in Australia. There is no doubt that GWLs and the inclusion of the quitline number on tobacco packaging has been a critical step in increasing awareness and access to an evidence-based cessation treatment option.

The main observations from Australia's experience so far are that:

- *the inclusion of the quitline number on tobacco product packaging is a very useful tool in promoting the number to the smoking population;*
- *consistently high levels of social marketing ensures high awareness of the quitline;*
- *since the introduction of enhanced GWLs in 2006, the landscape has changed with increased access to other options for promoting the quitline, such as digital marketing and increased spending on television-based social marketing activity conducted by both the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments; and*
- *the announcement of plain packaging, the increase in the price of tobacco products and subsidization of NRT have become significant drivers of calls to the quitline more recently.*

With implementation of plain packaging set to begin on December 1, 2012, the global quitline community will monitor the impact of the new packaging on quitline utilization and the response of Australia's quitline service providers to the programmatic and operational issues that may emerge. Certainly, Australia continues to lead global efforts in utilizing tobacco product packaging as a vehicle for reducing the appeal of tobacco products, reducing deceptive messages about harmfulness of tobacco products, educating consumers on harmful effects of tobacco use and directly marketing evidence-based cessation services (i.e., quitlines) to tobacco users.

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