

MEDIA RELEASE

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Time to stub out youth smoking

Convenience store industry body calls for prosecution of underage smokers

The Australasian Association of Convenience Stores is calling on the Federal Government to get serious about reducing youth smoking and make it illegal for under 18s to smoke.

Current legislation makes it illegal for retailers to sell tobacco to minors and heavy fines apply if they do, but the law contains no means to penalise young people for buying or smoking cigarettes.

AACS Executive Director, Sheryle Moon said that while education and awareness campaigns for young people are essential, until there is a real disincentive for kids to light up, we aren't doing enough to reduce youth smoking.

"AACS is calling on our lawmakers to introduce prosecution and penalties for those who are caught in the act to show that they are serious about cutting youth smoking rates," Ms Moon said.

"We already have a zero tolerance policy for unaccompanied minors possessing alcohol, so why can't we do the same with youth smoking? It is illegal to sell cigarettes to anyone under 18, but it isn't illegal for kids to possess a packet of smokes or have a puff."

The Federal Government has set an ambitious target for Australia to be the healthiest country in the world by 2020, with decreasing the number of teenagers who smoke as a top priority.

Ms Moon said that it is time to share the responsibility for youth smoking as current legislation placed a disproportionate burden on retailers like the convenience stores represented by the AACS.

"Under liquor laws, if a child is sold or given liquor on licensed premises, both the child and the licensee have committed an offence and can be punished accordingly.

"Yet when it comes to tobacco products, only the retailer is penalised. Where is the deterrent to make our kids stub out? We believe it is high time that the responsibility for youth smoking is shared and our young people are given a reason to think twice before sparking up," Ms Moon said.

"We agree convenience stores have a key role to play in limiting minors' access to cigarettes, but we can only do so much. Surely this is something we are all responsible for – retailers, parents, young people and the community at large."

Ms Moon said the facts regarding youth smoking highlight the need for urgent action from our lawmakers.

"There is no escaping the facts. A child who starts smoking aged 14 years or less is five times more likely to die of lung cancer than a person who starts aged 24. Every year 70,000 Australian children are looking down the barrel of dying from smoking related disease because they chose to take up the habit when they were young.

"If Australia is serious about becoming the healthiest nation in the world by 2020, we can no longer turn a blind eye to youth smoking. It's time to share the responsibility and make it illegal for our kids to smoke."

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About AACS

The [Australasian Association of Convenience Stores](#) (AACS) represents major convenience store retailer chains, independently operated retailers as well as petroleum and other industry suppliers, both large and small. AACS serves the convenience and petroleum retailing industry by providing industry knowledge, connections and advocacy to ensure the competitive viability of its members' businesses.

The AACS is an advocate of responsible retailing and is cognisant of community standards. It fully supports government objectives to reduce smoking rates in Australia and agrees high intensity caffeinated drinks are not suitable for children. The AACS also acknowledges that the consumer has a right to buy products which are legal and it supports consumers making informed choices.