

## **Submission on the Smoke-free Environments (Prohibiting Smoking in Motor Vehicles Carrying Children) Amendment Bill**

### **Introduction**

Platform Trust (Platform) is a peak body representing a wide range of mental health and addiction (MH&A) Non-Government Organisations (NGO) service providers across New Zealand. For further information about Platform Trust, refer to [www.platform.org.nz](http://www.platform.org.nz)

### **Background**

#### **Mental Health & Smoking**

There are strong connections between mental health disorders, and smoking addiction. These two things are often connected, as smoking is commonly used as a coping mechanism, and a form of self-medication by those with mental health disorders. Tobacco smoking is two times as prevalent in people with mental health disorders, and up to three times as high in people with other substance abuse disorders<sup>1</sup>. It is even more common among people who are in substance abuse recovery, with 74% to 98% smoking tobacco (the variation exists based on the type of substance). People with mental health disorders are more likely to die younger, largely due to the increased rates of smoking<sup>2</sup>.

#### **Who smokes in New Zealand?**

The demographics of who smoke in New Zealand are not equal. Māori & Pasifika have higher smoking rates (Māori = 34%; Pasifika = 20%; European = 12%; Asian; 7%), higher rates of tobacco related sickness, and higher rates of death related to smoking, than other ethnic groups<sup>3</sup>.

#### **Rates of Mental health disorders by demographic**

In New Zealand Māori & Pasifika are more likely to score highest on mental distress tests (as per 2012/13 Ministry of Health survey<sup>4</sup>), but the least likely to be diagnosed with a Mental health disorders. Mental distress is a strong indicator of a future mental health diagnoses<sup>5</sup>. This suggests that Māori & Pasifika are the most at risk groups who are often underdiagnosed.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tepou.co.nz/resources/the-physical-health-of-people-with-a-serious-mentalillness-andor-addiction-an-evidence-review/515>

<sup>2</sup> Thurgood, S. L., McNeill, A., Clark-Carter, D. & Brose, L. S. (2016). A systematic review of smoking cessation interventions for adults in substance abuse treatment or recovery. *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*, ntv127.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Health. *New Zealand Health Survey (2006/07 – 2017/18) data tables*

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Uploads/MHF-Quick-facts-and-stats-FINAL-2016.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/read-the-journal/all-issues/2010-2019/2017/vol-130-no-1454-28-april-2017/7223>



### Smoking Cessation treatments<sup>6</sup>

For people with mental health disorders, the most effective treatment for quitting if the person is unable to quit on their own, is the combination of bupropion (an anti-depressant used as a smoking cessation aid) and counselling. Nicotine replacement therapy is often also used at the same time, but this has shown to have no extra benefit on cessation rates once the bupropion/counselling strategy is implemented. People who have mental health disorders have higher rates of wanting to quit, but lower success rates. This is partly due to the barriers that people with mental health disorders face.

### Recommendations

- 1) Platform supports the bill's purpose of protecting children from harm associated with second-hand smoke.
- 2) Platform supports equitable, evidence based policy to minimise the harm associated with tobacco use, however we have some concerns about the impacts of unintended consequences on people with mental health and addictions.
- 3) Platform supports the Government's goal of 'Smoke-free Aotearoa New Zealand 2025'.

### Platform supports the bill's purpose of protecting children from harm associated with second-hand smoke

Platform Charitable Trust supports the Smoke-free Environments (Prohibiting Smoking in Motor Vehicles Carrying Children) Amendment Bill, and the improvements in health outcomes in children, that the bill will promote.

### Platform supports equitable, evidence based policy, to minimise harm associated with tobacco use, however we have some concerns about the impacts of unintended consequences on people with mental health and addictions

We believe that people with mental health disorders need to be recognised as a risk factor, before this amendment is put forth. While we agree that the best way to stop someone from smoking in a vehicle with a child present is for them to quit smoking, a fine may not be the correct strategy to get a person with a mental health disorders to quit, and in fact it may be counter-productive. The purpose of this Bill proposes to protect children from the harm associated with second-hand smoke and support New Zealand's responsibilities to

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<sup>6</sup> Liu, N. H., Daumit, G. L., Dua, T., Aquila, R., Charlson, F., Cuijpers, P., & Gaebel, W. (2017). Excess mortality in persons with severe mental disorders: a multilevel intervention framework and priorities for clinical practice, policy and research agendas. *World Psychiatry*, 16(1), 30-40.

protect children's health and wellbeing under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Ultimately, this is a part of the 'Smoke-free Aotearoa New Zealand 2025' initiative.

The research suggests that those living with severe mental health disorders and substance abuse disorders use tobacco smoking as a coping mechanism, and do so at a much higher rate of abuse, and consumption than the general population. If smoking cessation is the overall goal, being fined and adding more financial stress to a vulnerable population is unproductive. The most effective way for a person with a mental health disorder to quit smoking is a combination of drug treatment, and support/counselling. The negative reinforcement of a fine for smoking with a child in the car, may increase the need for a coping mechanism and further the addiction process.

Furthermore, the research has shown that these vulnerable populations are more likely to be Māori, or Pasifika<sup>7</sup>. These two populations are shown to be underdiagnosed for mental health disorders, as well as being the two populations most likely to smoke. This may further exacerbate health disparities (increased cancer, CVD, and oral health disease rates)<sup>8</sup> already experienced by Māori and Pasifika. This increased rate of smoking as a coping mechanism, may lead to further increased risk of smoking related diseases, and therefore morbidity in these populations.

Platform supports the Government's initiative of 'Smoke-free Aotearoa New Zealand 2025'.

Platform Charitable Trust supports the 'Smoke-free 2025' initiative, and the evidence based policies associated with it.

## **Conclusion**

The Smoke-free Environments (Prohibiting Smoking in Motor Vehicles Carrying Children) Amendment Bill is an excellent initiative to decrease the health concerns regarding second-hand smoke inhalation for children. It is our concern however, that inequities may be exacerbated due to unintended consequences of some of Aotearoa's most at-risk populations being hit hardest, leading to further tobacco use. The evidence suggests that if this at risk-population is put under further financial and social pressure to give up smoking, that they will to continue to use tobacco, and this will increase the health disparities already shown in this population. This is why we believe that those with Mental health disorders and Addictions need to be considered before this amendment is put forth.

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<sup>7</sup> See footnote 5

<sup>8</sup> See footnote 1