

INTERNATIONAL PREVENTION

The WHO Tobacco Free Initiative

By Harvey Lee

Waiting to board their flight to Hawai'i, passengers in Guam browse shops selling cigarettes for \$20 per carton, which is about half what they cost in Hawai'i. With the rise of global travel and trade, public health issues like the use of tobacco, alcohol, and illegal drugs increasingly require global solutions. International organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO) are sources of valuable information on this subject.

The WHO Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI) is an attempt to address the second major cause of death in the world by changing public policy. The initiative promotes proven strategies like banning advertisements for tobacco products, establishing smokeless environments to protect all citizens, and increasing the size of health hazard messages on cigarette packages.

One project of the WHO TFI is the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), which was launched in 2000. The FCTC is an international agreement to control the future spread of tobacco products through rules addressing issues such as tobacco advertising and the taxation of tobacco products. Four Pacific island nations have signed this convention: the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Republic of Palau, and Samoa.

In June 2002, the WHO TFI held a meeting to develop policy recommendations for reducing tobacco use and treating tobacco dependence. The resulting document, available at www.who.int/tobacco/resources/publications/tobacco_dependence/en, contains suggestions for governments, nongovernmental organizations, and health professionals. The recommended strategies include:

- changing public attitudes toward smoking and providing support for those who are trying to quit through a public health approach,
- promoting the use of clinical best practices among health professionals in order to help those addicted to tobacco to quit successfully, and
- increasing awareness of the need to change social norms by promoting the exchange of information.

More information about the WHO TFI is available at www.who.int/tobacco/about/en.

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