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EUROPEAN  
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TOBACCO  
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Lessons for Tobacco Control from the Covid-19  
Pandemic Experience



# Lessons for Tobacco Control from the Covid-19 Pandemic Experience

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# What happened in the Pandemic

Negative outcomes from SARS-CoV-2 (Covid-19) pandemic well-known

- ➔ Direct Health Effects
- ➔ Indirect Health Effects
- ➔ Financial Costs
- ➔ Political Effects
- ➔ Economic Effects



# Lockdowns - Economic & Social Costs

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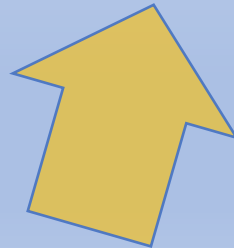
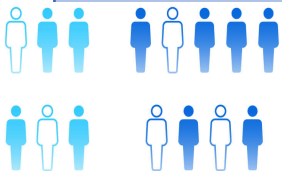
**Financial Costs** – not yet agreed  
but e.g. US\$16 Trillion

\$ € ¥ £

**Economic Costs** - stopping of  
manufacture, distribution and  
sale of all but essential goods.



**Social Costs** – discontinuation  
of all but essential services,  
closure of entertainment  
venues and activities.





# Positive Consequences



Positive less well highlighted



Science & research– extensive data collection & analysis, often in real time



Number, quality & speed of multicentre RCTs & rapid dissemination never seen before



Hugely effective vaccine development and deployment was unprecedented



The economic price agreed was 'whatever it takes'

# Unprecedented Societal Responses

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safeguarding the health

of the individual and community  
placed far ahead of

safeguarding the economy



EXPOSED

Decision makers' standard response - willingness to  
implement improvements and reforms, but the  
people would not tolerate the cost



# The Tobacco Control Story during Covid

Tobacco Control a largely negative story despite some bold initiatives

Spain - Smokefree laws extended to outside areas

South Africa, India, Botswana - bans on sale of tobacco & nicotine products

## WHO MPOWER policy suggestions

But unlikely to be implemented in an emergency when so commonly neglected during regular times.



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# What happened to Tobacco Control during Covid

- Data collection stalled- poor TC data gathered
- Cessation initially abandoned
- Policy initiatives moth-balled
- Price rises halted or reversed
- In some situations, cigarettes regarded as “essential supplies”
- Reduced enforcement of illicit trade in Tobacco
- WHO – “Meet Florence” MPOWER





# What happened to the Tobacco Industry during Covid

The Tobacco Industry saw their opportunity and

- increased their marketing through provision of e.g., items of PPE which were in short supply
- fought to maintain the 'rights' of smokers
- offered 'generous' help to governments
- promoted how 'good' they were for the economy



# Why

## were consequences different for Tobacco Control and TI during Covid-19

- Pre-pandemic failure to have TC needs recognised as essential or even important
- We had no plan for the pandemic
- We had no plan to deal with the TI
- We failed to make an impact on the strategic response to the pandemic
- We had few resources except unappreciated and numerically scanty human resources



# Lessons from the Pandemic experience for Tobacco Control

What have we learned and can we do better in future?

- We must improve our scientific research
  - Our TC monitoring and data collection was inadequate and not embedded in vital national statistics
  - We were unable to answer the basic question about the importance of smoking in Sars-Cov-2 infection
- We must invest in stopping this most preventable loss of health and life



# Lessons from the Pandemic experience for Tobacco Control

- We know what really matters in Tobacco Control e.g., MPOWER
- We know that bans on tobacco sales can be more effective if we control illicit trade
- But many countries slow to adopt or implement the strengthening of The Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products (FCTC Art. 15)
- But we seem willing to be fobbed off with trivial interventions
- We now know the people are prepared to meet the cost if we provide the leadership

**We must!**



There is a clear signal to  
End the Tobacco  
Industry

if we can demonstrate  
the need

and provide the  
Leadership

## Lessons



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# Smoking Cessation

1.3 billion people dependent on nicotine

We saw cessation services initially grind to a halt.

Why were we so slow to go online?

Services are recovering but

nicotine cannot be our best response

we need more and better drug interventions

We know that most smokers stop without medication

why not give non-drug services, delivered online, a better chance?



# Implications

Now is the best opportunity  
in two centuries to stop the  
devastation caused by the  
'Tobacco Century' and make  
this the

**Tobacco Free Century**



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