



Policy changes urgently needed to support tobacco cessation, warn respiratory groups

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), tobacco use kills more than 8 million people each year. Tobacco use also remains the main and most preventable cause of lung disease among both adults and children, and it is well-understand that the “big five” respiratory diseases (asthma, COPD, lung cancer, tuberculosis, pneumonia) and other acute lower respiratory tract infections are caused or worsened by tobacco product use and second-hand smoke exposure.

Despite this, smoking-cessation treatment remains poorly implemented in healthcare around the world; according to the WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic, only 23 countries worldwide offer cessation services that WHO describes as meeting best-practice levels.

Tobacco and nicotine addiction is not a lifestyle choice, but a chronic relapsing disorder that should be treated accordingly. When nicotine, the psychoactive component of tobacco, is inhaled, it reaches the brain rapidly and is highly addictive. Most smokers want to quit, but evidence has shown that only 3–5 percent of people who attempt to quit without professional medical support succeed after 6 months, highlighting the need for professional assistance when quitting tobacco.

In support of WHO’s World No Tobacco Day 2021 year-long global campaign to help 100 million people quit tobacco, FIRS urges policymakers and healthcare regulators to act urgently to:

- Make greater political and financial commitments to support tobacco and nicotine product cessation services that provide evidence-based effective treatments, including behavioural support or motivational interviewing in combination with pharmacotherapy.
- Optimise health systems by providing system-level tobacco cessation interventions, from primary care to secondary care, community programmes, and internet support.
- Support the implementation and enforcement of comprehensive tobacco control policies, such as those outlined in the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, to prevent tobacco product use and protect public health.

The unprecedented response to the COVID-19 crisis demonstrates more than ever the importance and effectiveness of making meaningful policy changes to tackle health challenges. FIRS urges policymakers to act now and help people to quit tobacco for good, protect public health and save lives, and reduce the burden on healthcare systems that is caused by tobacco product use.