

Potential for less smoking with new tobacco retailer restrictions, research shows

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Changing the way tobacco is sold is a crucial step in achieving the Government's 2025 smokefree goal, new University of Otago research suggests.

If the Government prevented new retail outlets from selling tobacco, while allowing existing [retailers](#) to continue selling tobacco until they closed or relocated, it could achieve a 50 per cent reduction in tobacco outlets by 2032, the research just published in medical journal *Tobacco Control* shows.

One of the study's authors, Co-Director of the Cancer Society Social and Behavioural Research Unit in the University of Otago's Department of Preventive and Social Medicine, Dr. Louise Marsh, says achieving this reduction would likely help lower smoking prevalence and health inequities.

"This approach would not achieve New Zealand's endgame goal of reducing tobacco availability to minimal levels by 2025, nor the sector's target of a 95 per cent reduction in outlet density by 2022, but would nonetheless result in a significant advancement from the status quo," Dr. Marsh says.

Decreasing the number of outlets that stock tobacco would help reduce youth smoking initiation and enable smokers to quit more easily, Dr. Marsh and her colleague, Dr. Lindsay Robertson, formerly from the Department of Preventive and Social Medicine, conclude.

The pair examined the impact of a hypothetical policy, which from 2020 restricted new retail outlets from selling tobacco. Existing retailers could continue selling until they closed their outlet or moved to a different location, when they could no longer sell from the new location.

The study used Stats NZ data on the number of tobacco outlets between 2006 and 2016 (supermarkets, convenience stores, service stations and liquor stores only), and the rate at which these stores naturally closed or relocated.

Based on mean annual closure rates, the total number of tobacco outlets would decrease by 27 per cent by 2025, 50 per cent by 2032 and 84 per cent by 2050.

The New Zealand government has committed to a goal of aiming to reduce smoking prevalence and tobacco availability to minimal levels by 2025, but has not yet initiated action to reduce tobacco availability since the goal was established in 2011.

Dr. Marsh says the policy identified is both feasible and effective in reducing tobacco availability.

"It doesn't ban existing retailers from selling tobacco, a concern that was recently expressed by Health Minister David Clark," she says.

"Existing tobacco retailers would not be disadvantaged. The emphasis is on preventing future retailers selling [tobacco](#) and contributing to our Smokefree 2025, a goal that will reap benefits for future generations of New Zealanders."

More information: Lindsay Robertson et al. Estimating the effect of a potential policy to restrict tobacco retail availability in New Zealand, *Tobacco Control* (2018). [DOI: 10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2018-054491](https://doi.org/10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2018-054491)

Provided by University of Otago

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