GIVE ME A SIGN!

Creating engaging and effective smoke-free and vape-free signage

MAKE SMOKING HISTORY®

New ways of thinking about signage

Smoke-free environments benefit everyone

Smoke-free environments encourage people who smoke to quit or smoke less, and they also protect non-smokers from the health harms of second-hand tobacco smoke[3].

Effective smoke-free signage plays an important role in creating, encouraging and supporting smoke-free environments. The traditional smoke-free symbol can be seen in numerous public places in Australia, including hospitals, restaurants, sports grounds and airports. The wording that appears with this symbol is important and can improve compliance with smoke-free environments[4].

Figure 1: Traditional smoke-free symbol

Does smoke-free signage work?

Yes, smoke-free signage does work! Research shows that smoke-free signage can reduce the amount of smoking in areas where signage has been displayed[5]. There is also evidence that creating more smoke-free areas can motivate people who smoke to quit or cut down[3].

What about vape-free signage?

Given the rapid rise in vaping in recent years, anti-smoking signage should include vape-free messages and symbols. There is strong evidence that vape aerosols contain toxic chemicals that are harmful to health so it is important to ensure that smoke-free areas are also vape-free[6].

Tips for creating effective smoke-free and vape-free signage

Figure 2: Make Smoking History signage used at a maternity hospital in Perth, WA.

1. Use positive language

People will be more likely to comply with smoke-free signage if it uses positive language rather than negative or stigmatising language[4]. Polite phrases such as "please" or "thank you", are more effective than messages that are blunt or overly direct. For example, a sign that uses language (e.g. "Please don't smoke near the children's playground" or "Thank you for not smoking") will be more effective than signage that issues a command (e.g. "You must not smoke here" or "Smoking is forbidden").

2. Use messages about health to motivate people to change their behaviour

Smoke-free messages that include a reason for not smoking are more effective than signs that simply say 'do not smoke'. Health and wellbeing messages that focus on the person who smokes, or the health of their community can be powerful. For example, information about the lung damage caused by smoking or vaping or the dangers of second-hand smoke for children or pregnant women.

Figure 3: "Little Lungs" signage at QEII hospital precinct in Nedlands, WA provides people with a clear reason for not smoking[1][2].

3. Use large images and clear wording to make sure your sign is seen

One way to increase the visibility of smoke-free and vape-free signage is quite simply to increase its size! Many smoke-free signs are too subtle, too small, or not clearly visible[7]. Having large, clear signage ensures that both smokers and non-smokers are aware that smoking is not permitted in an area.

4. Use symbols that people know

Short, positive messages are most effective when combined with a recognisable smoke-free and no-vaping symbol. The smoke-free and vape-free symbol does not need to be the biggest part of the sign, but it should be clearly visible (see Figure 4).

5. Link people to support services to quit smoking or vaping

When asking people to change their behaviour, it is important to provide support. Smoke-free signage should include information about support services to quit smoking and vaping. This may be an external organisation like the Quitline or, if relevant, staff at a nearby facility. For example, a sign at a public park might direct viewers to visit the Quitline website, whereas a sign at a hospital might direct patients to seek support from clinical staff.

At a minimum, signage should provide the telephone number and URL or QR code for a smoking cessation support service such as Quitline (13 7848 or www.quit.org.au).

6. Test out your signage

It's always important to test signage with the people who will see it. This means talking to staff, clients, patients, visitors, and the general public – whoever the signage is made for. Your target audience can have great ideas and provide valuable and honest feedback. This can be as simple as asking a few people in a room to share their thoughts, approaching members of the public, or conducting a short online survey.

Examples of good smoke-free signage

Key elements of a good sign

Positive tone and message

Clear, simple wording

Easily recognisable symbol

Direction to quit support

Link to quit support

Polite, friendly language

Positive imagery

Clear reason for not smoking

Size A4 or larger

THANK YOU FOR NOT SMOKING OR VAPING

WE CARE FOR YOUR HEALTH AND OTHERS

If you'd like to start your journey to quit smoking and/or vaping, speak to your GP or call 13 7848 or text 'call back' to 0482 090 634 to speak with a Quitline counsellor. They'd love to help.

Scan the QR code for more tips and support.

MAKE SMOKING HISTORY

Figure 4: Key elements in a good smoke-free and vape-free sign. Sign created by Make Smoking History.

Signage that engages people emotionally

Figure 5: Smoke-free and vape-free sign outside the Monash Children's Hospital, Victoria[8]

This sign, featured at Monash Children's Hospital, uses eye-catching imagery and an emotional and empathetic message.

Signage that refers to the benefits of not smoking

Figure 6: Smoke-free and vape-free sign produced by East Metropolitan Health Service, WA

This sign designed by East Metropolitan Health Service, is a good example of language that is positive and gives health-related reasons for not smoking. The imagery is positive and direction to quit support is provided.

Examples of signage that may not work

Signage that is too small to be visible

Figure 7: Smoke-free signage from a children's playground in New Zealand. Source: Wilson et al, 2016[7].

Whilst the smoke-free symbol on this sign is recognisable, the text is too small to be legible, and the sign overall is not eye-catching or noticeable, particularly when located next to a much larger sign.

Figure 8: Smoke-free signage used in Gainsville, Florida. Source: Platter et al, 2017[5].

The health message in this sign says, "For the health and safety of our kids please help us keep this park smoke-free." Whilst this is a good message, the small font makes it difficult to read.

Signage that sends a confusing message

Figure 9: Signage from a hospital in Perth, Western

Although located on a completely smoke-free hospital precinct, this smoke-free signage implies that it might be acceptable to smoke elsewhere, provided that it is not near the doors – even though this is not the case.

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