
Strengthening the EU Tobacco Taxation Directive to prevent cancer through increased taxes and a wider scope

Open letter to Wopke Hoekstra, European Commissioner for Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth

14 July 2025

Dear European Commissioner Hoekstra,

I am writing to you in my capacity as Executive Director of the [Association of European Cancer Leagues \(ECL\)](#), a non-profit, pan-European umbrella organisation of 34 national and regional cancer societies advocating for improved cancer control and care across Europe.

Tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable cancer, responsible for over a quarter (27%) of all cancer cases. Despite progress in tobacco control over recent decades, its prevalence and devastating health impacts remain unacceptably high. At the same time, the tobacco industry [continues to oppose and obstruct](#) public health efforts to protect people from tobacco, [investing millions](#) to undermine the implementation of effective EU tobacco control policies.

We strongly support the European Commission's ambition under Europe's Beating Cancer Plan to create a Tobacco-Free Generation by 2040, where less than 5% of the population uses tobacco, compared to [the current rates](#) of 26% of the overall population and 29% of young Europeans who smoke today.

The revision of the EU Tobacco Taxation Directive would be a key part of the EU's efforts to achieve a Tobacco-Free Generation. Increases in tobacco taxes are known to reduce tobacco consumption faster than any other single measure, saving millions of lives and reducing health-care costs in both the short and long term. This has been emphasised by the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), the [World Bank](#), and the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\)](#). Furthermore, tobacco taxation is considered a highly cost-effective "best-buy" intervention, with returns and economic benefits [far exceeding its costs](#).

However, as highlighted in the WHO's recent [Global Tobacco Epidemic report](#), cigarettes have become more affordable in over half of EU countries since 2014, undermining efforts to curb smoking.

In line with the European Commission's commitment under Europe's Beating Cancer Plan and its legal obligation under Article 6 of the [WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control](#), we urge you to revise the Tobacco Taxation Directive without delay. Ambitiously and substantially increasing the taxation of all tobacco products is one of the most powerful tools to reduce tobacco use and could prevent nearly a [quarter of a million premature deaths](#) caused by lung cancer each year across Europe.

In addition, the scope of the Directive should be expanded to include novel and emerging nicotine and tobacco products, such as electronic cigarettes, heated tobacco products and nicotine pouches. These profoundly addictive products are extremely popular among young Europeans and serve as [a potential gateway to cigarette smoking](#) and the use of other harmful substances.

The draft Impact Assessment prepared for the revision of the Tobacco Taxation Directive outlines several policy options. We call on you now to adopt the most ambitious approach, as it will lead to the highest cancer prevention benefits for people and societies across Europe while also ensuring stable and sustainable budgetary resources for national governments.

Thank you for your consideration. We remain available if you have any questions and look forward to working together towards a Tobacco-Free Generation.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Wolfgang Fecke

Executive Director

Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL)

The [Association of European Cancer Leagues \(ECL\)](#) is a non-profit umbrella organisation made up of 34 national and regional cancer leagues advocating for improved cancer control and care across Europe. Our vision is a Europe free of cancer. ECL is registered in the EU Transparency Register: Number 19265592757-25