



ACOSH

Australian Council on Smoking and Health

Media Release

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Ending tobacco-linked political donations long overdue, health groups tell inquiry

Public health groups will urge public hearings starting today (August 8) to close loopholes in political funding laws to prevent the tobacco industry from channelling secret donations through third parties.

Health experts from the Heart Foundation, Public Health Association of Australia, Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) Australia and the Australian Council on Smoking and Health (ACOSH) will appear in public hearings of a parliamentary Joint Standing Committee inquiry today in Canberra and tomorrow in Sydney.

The four groups have called for long-overdue reform in written submissions to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters inquiry into political funding.*

Says Professor Mike Daube, ACOSH President: "We seek action to ensure that the tobacco industry can't use its massive resources to gain influence and weaken public health policies that can save lives, health and money.

"Multinational companies making donations to politicians expect favourable treatment in return, seeking concessions that can only harm public health.

"The tobacco industry has given several million dollars over decades to political parties in their own names and they can also do so through a range of related interests. Restrictions should also cover 'front' organisations, such as those for the tobacco industry recently exposed in the media.

"This money is not given for nothing – the tobacco industry hopes to gain back-door influence over health policies so it can continue to promote and sell addictive products that each year kill over 15,000 people and drain our national economy of over \$31 billion."

The Gillard Government and the Greens have agreed that there will be a report to parliament by October, with recommendations for reform.

The four NGOs are calling for an end to any direct or indirect tobacco company donations, whether from local or foreign companies, and for measures to improve transparency and accountability.

Says ASH CEO Anne Jones: "Some parties, like the ALP and Greens and some state Liberal parties, refuse to accept tobacco company donations. But voluntary actions are no substitute for comprehensive legislation to prevent third parties, including fund-raising fronts and events, being used as channels to push tobacco agendas.

"This inquiry represents a real opportunity for reform after decades of delay. It's a chance for all parties to protect our democratic processes from the world's most lethal industry."

* Joint Standing Committee (webcast available) at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/em/political%20funding/index.htm

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