

# Assessment of tobacco control measures and smuggling in Panama

The Non-Communicable Disease Prevention (NCDP) program supports the generation of new knowledge to help inform policies and programs that are low cost but can have a high impact on reducing the non-communicable disease (NCD) burden and improving overall population health in low- and middle-income countries. NCDP funds research focusing on the main risk factors for NCDs: tobacco use, unhealthy diet, alcohol misuse, and physical inactivity.

## The challenge

Given the importance of the tobacco epidemic in Panama, there is a great need to establish fiscal policies, such as taxation and pricing laws, and other control measures to effectively curb the demand for tobacco products. Per capita income is increasing in the country, which increases the affordability of these products. This could lead to increasing tobacco use, particularly among youth, unless fiscal policies are adjusted to counter the trend. To develop appropriate fiscal policies, decision-makers need research on trends in demand for tobacco products in response to income changes and tobacco price changes in Panama over time.

Researchers also need to determine consumers' access to illegally imported cigarette products in Panama and their effects on tobacco use. An analysis of tobacco demand over time can allow researchers to measure the effectiveness of tobacco control initiatives, including fiscal policies. It can also allow them to investigate the possible impact of smuggling on tobacco use, as a result of implementing those measures.

## The research

This project aims to describe the evolution of the demand for tobacco in Panama from 2000 to 2010 and to assess the impact of fiscal policies and smuggling on tobacco use.

To do this, the team will estimate the changes in consumer demand for tobacco products in response to income changes and changes in tobacco prices in the short term and long term. The researchers will also measure how much impact fiscal measures, such as a price increase on tobacco products, may have on consumption and initiation of smoking in the short term and long term.

Additionally, the study will describe the brands, price, and sales methods used in the informal marketing of tobacco

products. It will then examine how these factors impact the affordability for residents of Panama City, and how the informal market may benefit the tobacco industry. The research team also plans to establish a system to obtain constant up-to-date information on brands and sales of imitation brand tobacco products in Panama City.

Finally, the team will interview owners and employees of public service establishments (such as bars, restaurants, casinos, and hotels). The researchers will ask these stakeholders to describe their views on how smoke-free space control measures impact their customer flows.

## Expected results

The project aims to:

- Produce evidence to justify continuing to reinforce tobacco use restrictions and fiscal or tax policies in Panama;
- Improve tobacco control policies through close work with the Ministry of Health and other ministries;
- Develop of further lines of research for future study;

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