

Public Support for Cigarette Pack Pictorial Health Warnings

Although the prevalence of cigarette smoking has been declining, tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable morbidity and mortality in the United States (US), accounting for more than 480,000 deaths each year. Approximately 12.5% of US adults currently smoke cigarettes, with prevalence rates being higher among certain populations, including those with lower incomes, those with lower educational attainment, and gender and sexual minority individuals. Health warnings on cigarette packages are among the most cost-effective tobacco control interventions available, and they are an especially effective channel for communicating the health risks of smoking to consumers due to their wide reach and the frequency with which warning labels are seen by people who smoke.

In March 2020, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) finalized the “[Required Warnings for Cigarette Packages and Advertisements](#)” rule, which establishes new warning labels for cigarette packages and advertisements consisting of text warning statements and accompanying color graphics that depict the negative health consequences of smoking. This rule is important for tobacco prevention and control efforts, as observational research shows that implementation of stronger cigarette pack warnings is associated with increases in tobacco-related knowledge, reductions in cigarette consumption, increases in tobacco cessation behavior, and decreased smoking prevalence. Additionally, experimental studies suggest that pictorial warnings are more effective than text-only warnings across a range of outcomes, including attention, attitudes, and intentions to either quit or not start smoking.

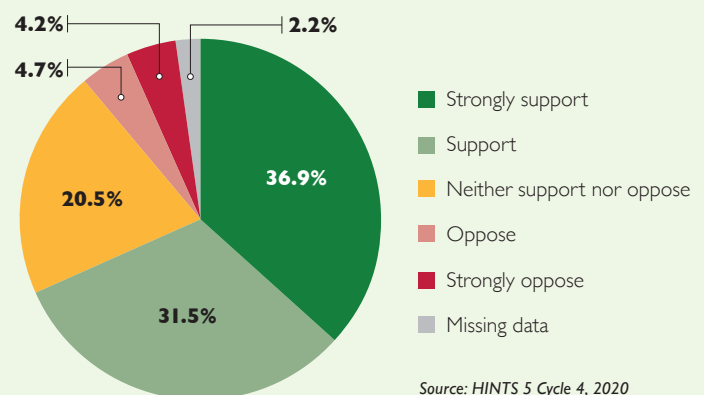
Assessing public opinion regarding pictorial health warning requirements is important because public support can influence not only policy adoption, but also the implementation and eventual effectiveness of a policy. Prior studies in the US have provided varying estimates of public support for pictorial warnings (ranging from 45% to 74%); however, nonsmokers have consistently been shown to be more supportive of pictorial warnings than smokers across studies. Some research also

Quick Facts

- Smoking remains the leading cause of preventable disease, disability, and death in the US
- Approximately 12.5% of US adults currently smoke cigarettes
- Smoking rates differ by sociodemographic characteristics including education, income, sexual orientation, and gender identity
- Requiring health warnings on cigarette packs is a cost-effective tobacco control measure, and research shows that pictorial warnings are more effective than text-only warnings across a range of outcomes
- In 2020, approximately 68% of US adults supported pictorial warning requirements for cigarette packs

suggests that support for pictorial warnings may vary by demographic characteristics, including income, education, and race/ethnicity. Understanding the current level of public support for pictorial warnings, as well as group differences in public opinion, can inform communication campaigns that seek to educate the public about FDA’s new pictorial health warning rule.

Percentage of US adults who support or oppose requiring cigarette pack warning labels that use both images and words to show the negative health effects of smoking:



Extent of Public Support for Pictorial Warning Requirements and Predictors of Policy Neutrality/Opposition

In a recently published study, researchers analyzed data from HINTS 5 Cycle 4 (2020) to assess current levels of public support for pictorial warnings and identify characteristics associated with neutrality or opposition to cigarette pack pictorial health warning requirements. The analysis showed that approximately 70% of US adults support requiring pictorial health warnings on cigarette packs, while 9% oppose and 21% neither support nor oppose requiring these warnings. Support for pictorial warnings was found to be relatively high across most groups, including current smokers, more than half of whom (55%) supported pictorial warnings. Although a majority of current smokers supported the policy, weighted, multivariable logistic regression models showed that current smokers had nearly twice the odds of being neutral or opposed to pictorial warnings as never smokers. The models also showed that individuals aged 75 or older were less likely to be neutral or opposed to pictorial warnings compared to those aged 18–34, and those who had children in their household were less likely to be neutral or opposed to pictorial warnings compared to individuals without children.

How Can This Inform Your Work?

HINTS data indicate that, in advance of FDA's implementation of pictorial warnings on cigarette packages, there is broad public support for this policy, including among current smokers who would be most affected by the new warnings. However, analyses also showed that people who smoke were more likely to be neutral or opposed to the policy than non-smokers. These findings may help guide targeted public health communication efforts as the policy is implemented. For example, prior research suggests that perceived effectiveness increases the acceptability of interventions, and informing people that pictorial warnings are more effective than text warnings increases support for pictorial warnings. Campaigns that inform the public about the value of pictorial warnings may therefore increase public support for requiring these types of warnings. Reaching smokers, in particular, with information about the effectiveness of pictorial warnings could be especially important in increasing their support for this policy and potentially lowering their reactance to the pictorial warnings when they are implemented. Additionally, adults with children in the household were less likely to be neutral or opposed to requiring pictorial warnings on cigarette packs compared to those without children in the household, which suggests that messages emphasizing the potential of pictorial warnings to decrease intentions to smoke among young people may increase public support—particularly among parents, who tend to strongly support tobacco policies that protect youth.

About HINTS

hints.cancer.gov

The National Cancer Institute (NCI) created the Health Information National Trends Survey (HINTS) to monitor changes in the rapidly evolving field of health communication. The survey data can be used to understand how adults use communication channels to obtain health information for themselves and their loved ones. HINTS data can also help practitioners create more effective health communication strategies. The HINTS survey has been fielded 13 times to date.

HINTS *Briefs* provide a snapshot of noteworthy, data-driven research findings. They introduce population-level estimates for specific questions in the survey and summarize significant research findings resulting from analyses of how certain demographic characteristics influence specific outcomes. Many *Briefs* summarize research findings from recent peer-reviewed journal articles that have used HINTS data.

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