

From the World Health Organisation



Progress towards the WHO target for reduction in tobacco consumption

The 1988 to 1995 Plan of Action for the WHO Programme on Tobacco or Health¹ proposed a target of tobacco use reduction that stated:

“—by 1995, at least 20% of Member States will have shown a decrease of more than 10% in tobacco consumption as compared to 1988.”

Because tobacco use is powerfully addictive and because, on a worldwide basis, there continue to be strong social and economic supports for tobacco use, even the most effective of global public health strategies can only hope to achieve modest reductions in tobacco use. That is why the WHO set a realistic target for reduction of tobacco use of 10% in 20% of Member States by 1995.

Tobacco control efforts of the WHO represent only one of many factors that can influence world tobacco consumption. Changes in national tobacco control programmes, and a variety of other social and economic factors affecting the supply of and demand for tobacco products, can also contribute to fluctuations in tobacco consumption. While it is difficult to know exactly which factors have contributed to recent changes in tobacco consumption, it is at least possible to monitor trends in this area.

What progress is being made towards achieving the WHO target for reduction in tobacco consumption? Tobacco consumption can be most conveniently measured by consumption of manufactured cigarettes per person 15 years of age and over. This indicator controls for the effect of population growth, but fails to account for the consumption of tobacco in forms other than manufactured cigarettes. This leads to underestimation of tobacco consumption for some countries, notably many countries of the Indian sub-continent, where other forms of tobacco use are very widespread. Nevertheless, comparable data on manufactured cigarette consumption are available for 115 countries.

Data are available on trends in manufactured cigarette consumption for the period 1985 to 1992.² Assuming that the same rate of change should apply to the period 1985 to 1992 as is

targeted for 1988 to 1995 by the WHO, we would expect to observe a decline of greater than 10% in more than 37 countries (20% of WHO's 187 Member States) in this indicator during the period 1985 to 1992. In fact, adult per capita tobacco consumption declined by more than this amount in 64 countries, so it could be said that the WHO target for tobacco use reduction is on its way to being exceeded by more than 70%.

However, such an observation needs to be tempered by the fact that consumption fell, although at less than the targeted rate, in 23 countries, and actually increased in 28 more. Moreover, one of the larger increases in per capita consumption from 1985 to 1992 (20%) took place in the world's largest producer and consumer of cigarettes – China. The net result was that worldwide consumption of cigarettes per adult decreased only modestly, by 6.1%, from 1985 to 1992. Notable public health successes of reductions in per adult cigarette consumption in some countries have been counterbalanced by a lack of public health success, signalled by strong gains in cigarette consumption, in other countries, notably China.

Still, for the first time in history, worldwide per adult consumption of manufactured cigarettes has entered a period of decline, albeit at the modest average annual rate of 0.9% over the period 1985 to 1992. Increased attention to the implementation of effective comprehensive tobacco control programmes in all countries and at the international level is necessary to accelerate the rate of decline of cigarette consumption, and to slow the progress of the tobacco pandemic.

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1 World Health Organisation. *WHO Programme on Tobacco or Health – Plan of Action: 1988–1995*. Document No. EB83/OC/WP/8. World Health Organisation, Geneva, 1988, p 5.

2 *World Tobacco Situation*. Circular Series FT-8-92, Foreign Agricultural Service, United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC, USA, August, 1992.