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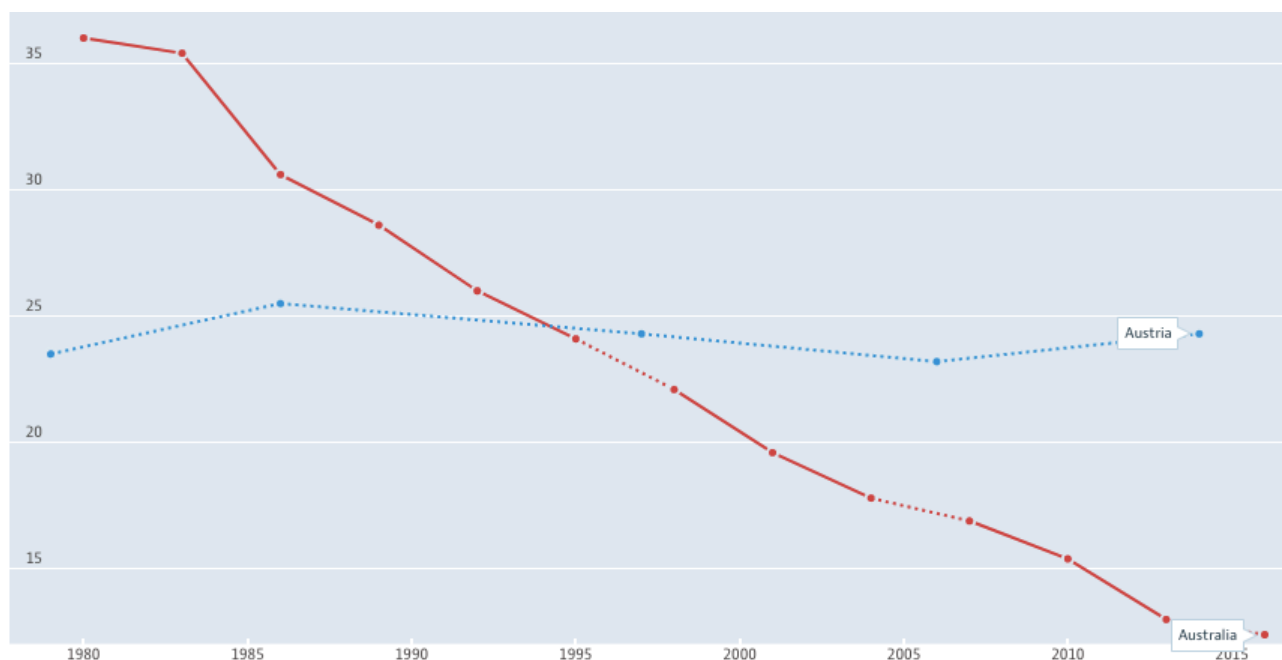
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Sebastian Kurz, your leadership is needed to protect the youth

As the former President of the World Federation of Public Health Associations, I had the privilege to visit many countries which strongly reduced their smoking rate and effectively protect their non-smokers. Austria was not yet able to do so. Now, I also have the good fortune of having a young man from Austria living in my home as part of a Student Exchange Scheme. I am concerned for his health and the health of his siblings, his friends and his fellow Austrians. That's why I would like to share some of our experiences from Australia.

Smoking in Austria and Australia

The following OECD data show the 'daily smoking rates' in our countries. Since the 1970s, there are slightly more smokers in Austria but two-thirds less smokers in Australia:



Source: <https://data.oecd.org/healthrisk/daily-smokers.htm>

This marked contrast is also seen in youth smokers. In Austria, 27% of 15 year olds were smokers in 2013. In Australia, young people are now overwhelmingly rejecting all forms of smoking. In 2014 the percentage of secondary students aged 15 years who smoked tobacco was less than 5%ⁱ. The latest statistics indicate that this has reduced even further, so that in 2016 less than 1% of 12-15 year olds had ever tried smokingⁱⁱ.

What could Austria learn from Australia?

There are several lessons that can be learnt from the persistent approach taken by Australian governments. Tobacco control has not been a party political issue, as governments of both Labor and Liberal persuasion have supported strong, comprehensive approaches and maintained tight controls on tobacco sale, marketing and pricing. The priority of Australian ministers and members of parliaments has been to protect the community – but particularly to protect our children.

As tobacco is such a lethal product, action to reduce smoking has been extensive and multi-faceted. Smoke-free environments have been legislated in the workplace, anywhere in public where people are eating, schools, public transport and, more recently in hotels and clubs with liquor licences. Other actions by governments include restrictions on labelling, advertising and promotion, as well as action on pricing and taxation. There have also been proactive initiatives such as insisting on plain packaging of tobacco, funding of mass media advertising campaigns about the dangers of smoking and on the impact of passive smoking especially on babies and children.

Misinformation by the industry

I had the privilege of being Minister for Health in the Australian Capital Territory and was given warnings about the dire consequences the hospitality industry would suffer if I introduced smoke-free areas in hotels. The opposite happened – the industry thrived. I found out later that many of the warnings came from “community” organizations established and funded by big tobacco companies.

There is a long history of the tobacco industry intimidating, bribing, cajoling and using myriad other techniques to prevent governments from interfering with their domination in the “free market of tobacco”. The tobacco industry continues the same processesⁱⁱⁱ. Governments that have prioritized the health of their children and community have resisted this domination by following evidence-based strategies. Through such legislation, and other actions, they have reduced suffering from tobacco-related diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular, diabetes and kidney disease.

Tobacco companies prioritize their profit over human suffering and death. This is why they are seeking a precedent to weaken action on tobacco related harm. For Austria to set such a precedent would be an appalling decision for their own children and for the broader community. Alternatively, Austria can resist and introduce smoke-free hospitality venues.

My wishes for Austria

Tobacco is the only product which, when used exactly as directed, will cause the deaths of two thirds of its regular users. The evidence is overwhelming and includes a study of two hundred thousand people conducted in 2014 in my home country of Australia^{iv}. It is sad, that a wonderful country like Austria still has such a big tobacco problem. But progress is possible and Austria is now in a position to make huge strides in improving the lives of the community and particularly the future of the next generation. Like the delightful young Austrian, who for a short time, is a part of my family.

I urge you to take action on tobacco and second-hand smoke. In Austria, as in Australia, there is nothing that could do more to promote health and to prevent death and disease.



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ⁱ Cancer Council (Australia) *Tobacco in Australia: Facts and Issues* (2018) Chapter 1.4 Prevalence of Smoking – Young Adults.

<http://www.tobaccoinaustralia.org.au/chapter-1-prevalence/1-4-prevalence-of-smoking-young-adults>

ⁱⁱ Australian Government Australian Institute of Health and Welfare *National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2016: Detailed Findings* (Sept 2017) Chapter 3 Table 3.3

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/illegal-use-of-drugs/2016-ndshs-detailed/data>

ⁱⁱⁱ Daube, M *Tobacco in Australia: time to get back to basics* (2018) MJA Insight

<https://www.doctorportal.com.au/mjainsight/2018/16/tobacco-in-australia-time-to-get-back-to-basics/>

^{iv} Banks, E et al *Tobacco smoking and all-cause mortality in a large Australian cohort study: findings from a mature epidemic with current low smoking prevalence* (2015) BMC Medicine

<https://bmcmmedicine.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12916-015-0281-z>