

Strategically Timed Campaigns Help Motivate the Mexican Government to Ban Smoking and Tobacco Marketing

It was almost midnight on April 28th, 2021. This was the last chance for federal deputies to call the legislative chamber to session and vote on a critical amendment to Mexico's General Tobacco Control Law for the year. The proposed amendment would make the law more comprehensive by including 100% smoke-free places across the country and banning tobacco advertisement, promotion and sponsorship (TAPS).

Over the years, the tobacco industry had been hooking youth on its deadly products with appealing advertising. According to México SaludHable, a local organization, if there were no tobacco marketing in Mexico in the next 10 years, 15,000 lives could be saved and the health system could save USD \$1 billion. A national smoke-free law would save 20,000 lives a year. However, since 2008, the General Tobacco Control Law has had no major changes and the tobacco industry has strongly opposed any tobacco control bills that were sent to Congress.

The vote on the amendment took place just four minutes before the hour, and with 415 votes of the 417 deputies present in favor, the first step to approve the bill was taken. Now the responsibility was in the Senate.

This bill passing the house and landing in the Senate was a tremendous victory and the result of a series of strategic, coordinated activities by advocates, including Vital Strategies, that created just the right conditions for the bill to move forward.

First, many local organizations, including Salud Justa MX, Coalición México SaludHable, Refleacciona and Polithink, launched a campaign promoted among the decision-makers in the Congress. The [Sin Cigarro](#) campaign called for a vote in favor of a law that would protect children from second-hand smoke. The organizations gave each of the legislators in the health committee a handbook called "Es por todos, Sí a la Reforma de Ley para el Control del Tabaco" ("It's for all, yes to the tobacco control law amendment") and a series of infographics containing key data highlighting tobacco's damage.



Population

128.9 million

Smoking Prevalence

27% of men, 8.7% of women, 6.7% of boys, and 3% of girls use tobacco¹.

¹National Survey of Drugs, 2017

Tobacco Control Case Study: Mexico

In addition, Vital Strategies launched a campaign called “[How Do I Explain It?](#)”, telling the story of a father in the streets of Mexico pleading for Mexicans to support smoke-free places. His reason for the plea is soon revealed when we see him arriving at the respiratory clinic where his daughter is using oxygen because of the damage secondhand smoke has caused her. A public service announcement (PSA) associated with the campaign reached more than 50 million people in the second half of the year. In cooperation with media outlets, the PSA was aired for free by El Heraldo TV and at minimal cost on TeleUrban.

Vital Strategies, local partners and media outlets also worked to convey the importance of a comprehensive tobacco control law. A series of ads were published in national newspapers, including Reforma, El Heraldo and Proceso—the key newspapers read by decision-makers. A strong public relations effort also led to more than 20 interviews in top news programs and newspapers including [Business Insider](#), [Yahoo! Finance](#), [El Universal](#), [La Jornada](#), and [Eduardo Ruíz-Healy](#). Press conferences from local partners also amplified the cause in national and local newspapers. In all, news stories and interviews resulted in the equivalent of USD \$560,000 in media coverage.

Finally, Vital Strategies designed and implemented a strategy to activate online champions: a community of more than 70,000 Mexicans who, since 2018, had become part of the Mexico Sin Humo movement by signing a petition in support of a smoke-free Mexico. Via Twitter, Mexican advocates targeted their deputies and senators by sharing messages about evidence-based practices promoted by the World Health Organization to protect nonsmokers from the dangers of secondhand smoke and tobacco marketing.

All of these efforts led to approval of the bill by the Senate, and with that, this historic win marked the first major change to the General Tobacco Control Law in 13 years. The achievement was the result of years of hard work, strategic messaging and cooperation between local and international partners since 2008. This close, sustained cooperation led to the most important tobacco control win in Mexico in more than a decade.



A screenshot from the PSA, “How Do I Explain It?”

This case study is part of a series highlighting our work in the Bloomberg Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use in priority countries.

About Vital Strategies

Vital Strategies is a global health organization that believes every person should be protected by a strong public health system. We work with governments and civil society in more than 73 countries to design and implement evidence-based strategies that tackle their most pressing public health problems. Our goal is to see governments adopt promising interventions at scale as rapidly as possible. To find out more, please visit www.vitalstrategies.org or Twitter [@VitalStrat](https://twitter.com/VitalStrat).