

A Strong Strategy Results in a Triple Victory

Vital Strategies Philippines is part of the Sin Tax Coalition, comprised of medical societies and civil society organizations, which advocate for the passage of laws to increase taxes in tobacco, and reduce use of e-cigarettes and alcohol. A combination of mobilizations, mass media and social media campaigns helped to usher in an increase in tobacco taxes in June 2019, and an increase in taxes on e-cigarettes in December 2019.

To set the scene for these policy wins, Vital first launched a Smoke-Free Caravan Tour in 2017 with a key message that *Increasing Tobacco Taxes Will Save Lives*. The caravan tour reached major cities across the country, from Luzon to Visayas to Mindanao, advocating for smoke-free environments and the importance of increase tobacco taxes to reduce tobacco use.

More than 20 major cities and towns supported the advocacy efforts. Multiple city-level actions were initiated during the tour, including smoke-free runs, workshops, press conferences, and wellness activities, all to engage and gender coverage of the need for tobacco control.

Social media parties (a gathering of youth and advocates, posting continuously to support an issue), were staged through Facebook and Twitter. Supporting posts and tweets from different parts of the country generated the sense of a nationwide initiative. Meanwhile, other members of the Sin Tax Coalition pushed for policy change inside and outside of Congress halls, including room to room visitation in both Houses of Congress to support the tobacco tax bill.

In addition, two media campaigns were launched to educate the public and build support for the tax increase. The first, *Mother's Plea*, featured a mother, sharing her wish that cigarette prices were higher so that her son, who had started smoking, and other young people, wouldn't be able to afford cigarettes. The campaign was launched in January 2018 to coincide with the resumption of the legislative sessions. A second campaign, launched in May entitled *The Fight Is Not Yet Over*, featured the author of a strong tax bill, who was also a strong man in his own right, Senator Manny Pacquiao, a world boxing champion, calling for an increase in cigarette taxes.

A strategic move to encourage the Department of Health and the Department of Finance to join the Sin Tax coalition, also played a crucial role.



Population

106.7 million

Smoking Prevalence

42% of men, 5.8% of women, 22.2% of boys and 10.4% of girls currently use tobacco¹.

Tobacco Control Policies

Smoking is banned in a majority of indoor and outdoor premises. Tobacco advertising and promotion is prohibited. Pictorial and text health warnings are required to cover the lower 50 percent of tobacco packaging. E-cigarettes are banned in public places.

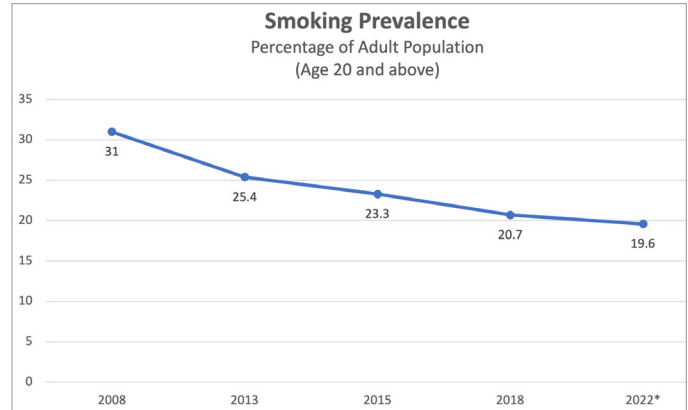
Milestone

The Philippines is one of the few countries in the world that uses tobacco and alcohol tax revenue to help to provide for Universal Health Coverage for all of its citizens.

¹ Global Adult Tobacco Survey, 2015



Smoke-free Caravan Tour in The Philippines



Source: National Nutrition Survey, 2020

Policy Wins

Advocates, leveraged the bill offering it as a way to help pay for universal health coverage and labeled it a twin win in that it would increase tobacco taxes and help finance the Universal Health Care (UHC) bill. The UHC bill was signed into law in March 2019. The tobacco tax bill was signed shortly after, in July. After industry allies inserted a provision to tax e-cigarettes by a measly 10 US cents per 10 ml of liquid, advocates were motivated to continue the fight to increase taxes on e-cigarettes.

By December, a final bill was passed that not only increased excise taxes on alcohol and e-cigarette, but also mandated the Philippines' Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulate e-cigarette products, including banning their sales to non-smokers, as well as to people under 21 years old and banning flavored products. As a result, the Philippines became the first country in the world to tax vape products.

Together, these three policy wins are expected to reduce the prevalence of tobacco and e-cigarettes use by an estimated 20% in the Philippines. To top it off, an executive order was signed by the president in January 2020 banning the use of e-cigarettes in public places.

This case study is part of a series highlighting our work with 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 70 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.