**Cigarettes in Indonesia shouldn’t be more affordable than milk or eggs** (539 words)

Since 2000, trips to the market have become increasingly more affordable for the average Indonesian. In the country, incomes are rising faster than the prices of essential food products; allowing consumers to buy more foods like eggs, rice, and milk. The increasing affordability of important products is usually a good thing for consumers: After all, who doesn’t like better prices at the market?

However, there is one product widely used by Indonesians for which increasing affordability does more harm than good: cigarettes.

Since 2000, purchasing tobacco – like other consumer products – has become more affordable for the average Indonesian, especially young people. Cigarettes are becoming easier to afford even faster than household basic food products like milk or eggs.

Indonesia has some of the cheapest cigarettes in the world; in 2010 cigarettes were 56% more affordable than they were in 2000.

This trend is deadly – with costs that affect all of us. Last year around the world, tobacco killed more than 7 million people. The total economic cost of smoking represents 1.8% of global GDP, including direct health-related costs and indirect costs in lost productivity and the death of workers. These numbers are just the tip of the iceberg of the vast damage caused by tobacco.

Each year cigarettes make hundreds of thousands of Indonesians die early or fall ill from tobacco-related diseases like cancer, lung disease or heart disease. This terrible public health crisis is entirely solvable – but the government must take action.

The best solution is to raise tobacco taxes to substantially increase the final retail price of cigarettes to make them, less affordable for consumers. Higher, well-designed tobacco taxes on all tobacco products, which result in a substantial increase of the final price, make them less affordable, prevent youth from starting to smoke and encourage smokers to quit, is going to save thousands of lives. Around the world, evidence has demonstrated tobacco taxes as the most effective way to reverse the tobacco epidemic.

Increasing tobacco taxes will improve national health, but that is not the only benefit. Tobacco taxes also increase the revenue of the government, providing necessary money that can then be reinjected into the economy. [In South Africa, every 10% increase in cigarette excise tax has led to about a 6% increase in cigarette excise revenues, even as tobacco use declined. In Thailand, as consumption decreased, tobacco taxes increased revenue from 20,002 million THB in 1994 to 41,528 million THB in 2007](https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/assets/global/pdfs/en/TAX_countering_industry_claims_en.pdf).

Currently, tobacco products are taxed at a rate of XX percent. This is still far from the 70% recommended by the World Health Organization and not nearly enough to decrease affordability and disincentivize millions who currently purchase tobacco products regularly. The government must raise taxes more than income growth and inflation to discourage youth from using tobacco, encourage current users to quit and provide much-needed money for the Indonesian people.

When tobacco taxes are raised, we all win.