

A step change for tobacco control in China?



Lu Guoqian/Xinhua Press/Corbis

China's people are at grave risk of tobacco-related diseases. The prevalence of smoking in China is 52.9% among men and 2.4% among women, equating to more than 300 million smokers aged 15 years and older. Annual health costs of an estimated ¥41 billion (US\$5.0 billion) have been attributed to the major smoking-related diseases—cancer, cardiovascular disease, and respiratory illnesses. China signed the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in 2003, but its tobacco control efforts have fallen behind those of many developing countries.

On Nov 24, a long-awaited draft national tobacco control guideline was released by China's State Council, aiming to reduce the harms of tobacco smoke and protect public health. This is the first time that the Chinese Government has considered state-level legislation on tobacco control. According to the proposed regulations, smoking is to be prohibited in all indoor and some outdoor public places, including schools and hospitals for women and children. All tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship will be banned, and health warnings

are to cover 50% of all tobacco packages. There are to be strict controls on selling tobacco to minors, and smoke-free families will be promoted. Fines will be imposed for violation of the regulations, and the Administrative Department for Health and Family Planning is to oversee smoking control in public places; governments at all levels should guarantee funding for smoking control measures.

On Nov 28, Beijing's Municipal Government passed the new legislation with effect from June 1, 2015. Although this step paves the way for strong action on tobacco control at a national level, challenges remain. Enforcement is key for smoking bans—how thoroughly will smoking prohibition be observed and enforced throughout China? Taxes on tobacco products need to be raised substantially to discourage smoking, and effective smoking cessation treatments will be needed to help China's large population of smokers to quit. China's new move against smoking is a welcome step, but further strong action will be needed to strengthen tobacco control and reduce the enormous toll of death and disease. ■ *The Lancet*

For more on the **2014 China State Council draft tobacco guideline** see http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-11/26/content_18980243.htm

For more on the **Beijing Tobacco Control Law** see <http://www.wpro.who.int/china/mediacentre/releases/2014/2014112802/en/>

Changing attitudes to child disability in Africa



Jenny Matthews/Panos Pictures

It is a punishment from God, witchcraft, the fault of the mother, reincarnation. These are all frequently stated causes for disability in children in Africa. Such false beliefs are deeply rooted in tradition and culture. In truth, most children with disabilities in Africa have been disabled by the sad predicaments that continue to haunt the continent: war, poverty, and inadequate access to health care. A new report released this week by the African Child Policy Forum draws attention to the challenges facing children with disabilities in Africa.

Africa has a large population of children with disabilities; the prevalence of moderate to severe disability in children aged younger than 14 years is 6.4%. These children are largely invisible in society because of stigma and discrimination by most people, including their parents. They face many physical barriers in daily life, discriminatory practices, and even direct abuse and violence. For example, children with speech impairments are at five times greater risk of neglect and physical abuse than children without disabilities, and three times greater risk of sexual abuse, according to the report. Mortality in

children younger than 5 years with disabilities in some African countries is as high as 80%.

The report calls for five priority actions for African nations: put in place and implement appropriate legislation, policy, and programmes in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; develop and implement effective child protection measures; ensure provision of basic services in a disability-friendly manner; improve physical accessibility of the built environment; and generate evidence and promote evidence-based advocacy and learning.

Children with disabilities have valuable contributions to make to society but are kept from realising their full potential because of people's attitudes to disability. As Shuaib Chalklen, UN Special Rapporteur on Disability, states in the report, the hope is that its findings will "re-orient society's thinking and its treatment of children with disabilities, moving from an attitude of rejection and neglect to one of respect and inclusion". Prominent, respected members of African society have a vital part to play in aiding this reorientation. ■ *The Lancet*

For the **report** see <http://www.africanchildforum.org/site/index.php/disabilitysymposium.html>