

# Smoking: Price and Affordability

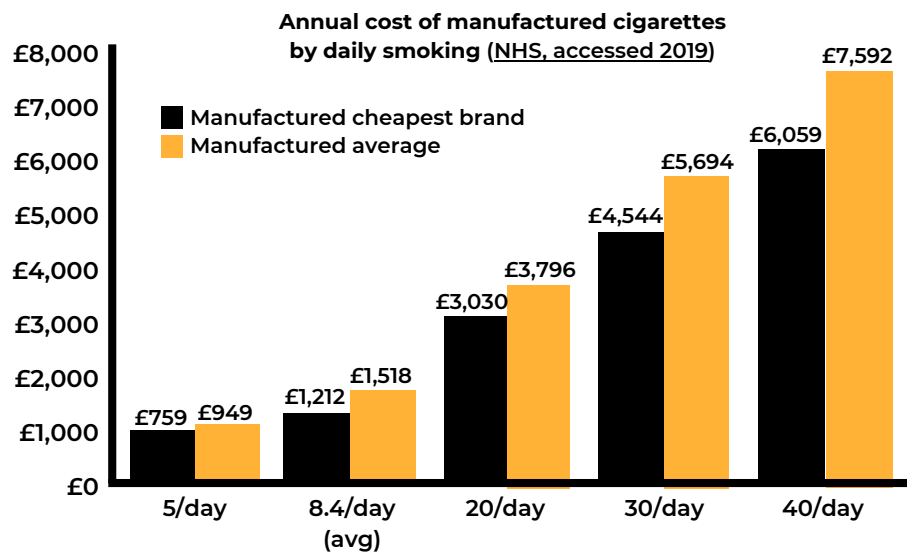
- Smoking is an extremely expensive addiction. Price rises are the most effective motivator for quitting smoking and can impact smokers on lower incomes who are more price sensitive.
- For more information, take a look at the Tools and Resources section of the [Health Inequalities Resource Pack webpage](#).



## Smoking is an extremely expensive addiction

Average cigarette consumption in Great Britain fell to its lowest level in 2018 at 8.4 cigarettes per day, though this figure is very likely to be an underestimate, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2019).

Even with consumption at its lowest recorded level, average cigarette expenditure remains high, costing around £1,518 per year, over £125 a month.



Consumption is not uniform across groups. Smokers from low SES groups are more likely to be heavily addicted and find it harder to stop smoking (ONS, 2019). Whilst the majority of ABC1 smokers consume 6 or fewer cigarettes a day, the majority of C2DE smokers consume 11-20 (ASH/YouGov, Smokefree GB Survey, 2019).

Tobacco addiction also has a greater financial impact on low SES groups. On average, people who smoke and live in social housing lose 12.4% of their weekly disposable income to tobacco, compared to 8.4% for people who own their property outright (ASH, 2019).



## Price is an effective motivator for quitting smoking

Reducing the affordability of tobacco is highly effective in reducing smoking rates (WHO, 2011). Affordability has the most impact on those who are most price sensitive, such as low SES smokers and younger smokers, and is therefore key to reducing health inequalities.

In a survey of nearly 2,500 UK smokers and ex-smokers (Vangeli, West, 2008):

- “a decision that smoking was too expensive” was the third most commonly cited trigger of respondents’ most recent quit attempt (with the two most common triggers being future or current health concerns).
- When breaking down responses by SES, cost was a more commonly cited trigger amongst low SES smokers whilst high SES smokers were more likely to report concern about future health.

## Use price as a motivator

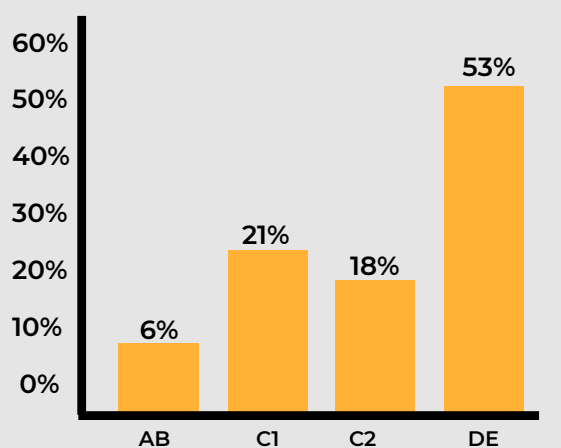
Local authorities can make the best use of price as a motivator for quitting smoking by:

- Including information and advice on the financial gains from quitting or cutting down as part of financial inclusion/debt advice support.
- Having clear referral routes between financial inclusion/debt advice and smoking cessation support.

### Case study: Smoking-related financial advice

Citizens Advice Gateshead, supported by Public Health Gateshead, adopted a 'making every contact count' approach to health care – training its staff to engage with the public and talk to them about their health and wellbeing, including smoking. Discussing the financial impact of smoking as well as providing information on how to access stop smoking support was received positively by service users. Success was indicated by reports of clients being able to reduce their smoking as a result of the support, feeling less stressed and anxious and being better able to deal with their financial affairs because of the increased income from tobacco expenditure savings. This approach has now been embedded as a routine part of day-to-day practice.

## Preventing price motivation from being undermined: Illicit tobacco



Illicit tobacco can be sold for as little as half market price and is disproportionately bought by more price sensitive smokers from low SES groups.

To combat this, local authorities should:

- Develop strategic partnerships with health organisations, HMRC and the police to share intelligence and enforcement activity.
- Utilise effective social marketing campaigns to shift comfort levels around illicit tobacco and reduce demand (see Fresh's 'Keep it Out').
- Collaborate across wider regional footprints.

Percentage of smokers, by socioeconomic status, who have ever bought illicit tobacco (North East England Illicit Tobacco Study, 2017)



## Myth: Tax increases on tobacco products fuel illicit trade

The tobacco industry often claims that increasing taxes on their products will make them too expensive and push smokers to the illicit market.

Not only has the the volume of illicit tobacco on the UK market continued to decline in previous years, despite increases in tobacco prices, (HMRC, 2019) but research from the University of Bath and King's College London has found that the industry consistently increased their prices beyond what was required by Government - sometimes by as much as 50% more. If the tobacco industry's concerns were genuine, they would only increase prices by as much and as often as required by law (Hiscock et al, 2019).