

THE RIGHT TO KNOW ABOUT HEALTH HARM: A GOVERNMENT OBLIGATION, NOT A CHOICE

The labelling of products that present health risks is required by international human rights law, as part of people’s right to health, which includes the right to know.

Warning labels are applied to tobacco products in many countries, but alcohol and foods high in salt, sugar and fat are also harmful to health. Consumers must be aware of it, so they are able to make informed decisions.

These products, together with physical inactivity and air pollution, are driving up the burden on noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) like diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular disease.



However, these policies are far from the norm

Only

10 COUNTRIES have mandatory front-of-package warning labels on unhealthy food products*



7 LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES have implemented large tobacco warnings with all appropriate characteristics**

1 COUNTRY provides warnings on alcohol about the cancer risk, despite undisputable evidence

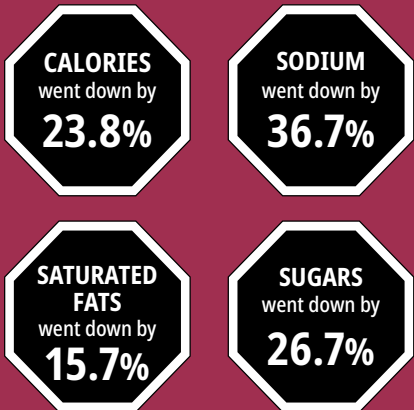
*[Global Food Research Program](#) (March 2025)

** [WHO report on the global tobacco epidemic](#), 2025

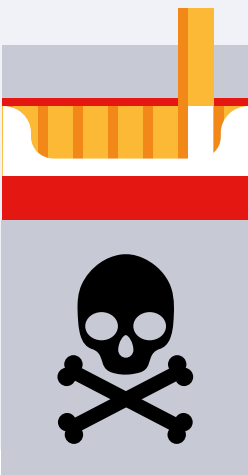
WARNINGS ON UNHEALTHY FOODS WORK

One of the most effective labels on food products has been the black octagon introduced mandatorily by Chile in 2016 and replicated by other countries in Latin America. These are true warning labels, making it easy for shoppers to identify products that contain excessive amounts of harmful nutrients, such as fats, salt and sugar.

In Chile, from 2015 to 2017, purchases of products with warning labels for



EFFECTIVE LABELLING: LESSONS LEARNT FROM TOBACCO CONTROL



Labelling design matters. Based on lessons learnt from the tobacco control response, there are certain design elements that are proven effective.

Warning labels should:

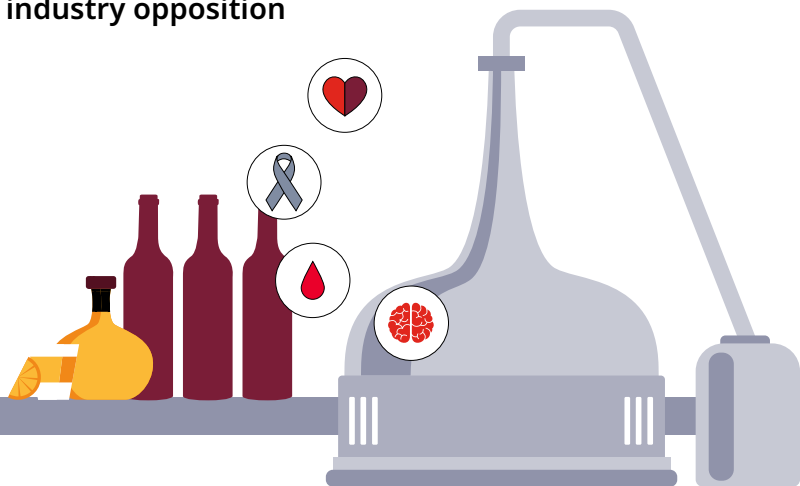
- **Be placed on the front** of the product package
- **Be highly visible** (e.g., large, graphic elements, contrasting colours, no obstructions)
- **Identify the most effective messages** that will encourage behaviour change for each product

Who will be the first country outside Latin America to adopt this labelling system?

Limited progress on alcohol labelling due to industry opposition

Alcohol labelling is often the least regulated, despite strong and well-evidenced links between alcohol and numerous health harms including cancer. This is due largely to industry interference in policymaking.

An experiment in Yukon (Canada) included cancer warnings on alcohol products, but it was stopped after only one month due to industry threats. However, one month was long enough to show significant consumption reductions.



CALL TO ACTION

We call on all countries to implement tobacco health warnings in line with the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control; adopt mandatory nutrition-specific warning labels on unhealthy foods to prevent diet-related NCDs;¹ and prioritise the implementation of alcohol labelling based on the lessons learnt from tobacco and nutritional labelling.

Labelling policies should be implemented as part of a comprehensive package of NCD prevention policies together with **marketing restrictions**, **fiscal measures**, and other population-wide policies across unhealthy products, while promoting health literacy, and increasing access to healthy options in the case of food.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENTS

- 1 Enact mandatory health warning policies on labelling across NCD risk factors.
- 2 Ensure the development and implementation of labelling policies are safeguarded against industry interference.
- 3 Be comprehensive and specific on the design elements of health warnings and other implementation considerations for labelling policies.
- 4 Fund research to increase the evidence base on the effectiveness of health warnings across NCD risk factors and the ongoing monitoring of labelling policies.
- 5 Request guidance from WHO and other relevant UN bodies on how to overcome trade challenges around labelling policies.

More detailed information and recommendations can be found in:

[Warning against harm: Lessons and recommendations to advance labelling policy across risk factors for noncommunicable diseases](#)

¹ Governments can also consider implementing a different mandatory front-of-package nutrition labelling system, based on the country's policy objectives and results from local consumer research and pre-marketing testing. Our recommendation is based on the positive outcomes from nutrient-specific warning labelling policies already documented in Latin America, and studies showing this model outperforms in discouraging the consumption of unhealthy products for the prevention of NCDs.