

The future

"There will be 1 billion deaths from tobacco in the 21st century unless strong and sustained action is taken now."
Richard Peto and Alan Lopez, 2002

Future predictions are by their nature speculative, but some things are certain: the epidemic, with its attendant health and economic burden, is both increasing and also shifting from developed to developing nations; and more women are smoking.

The industry is consolidating, and also shifting from the west to developing regions, where there may be less government control and public debate about the role of transnational tobacco companies.

The future looks bleak; the global tobacco epidemic is worse today than it was 50 years ago. And it will be even worse in another 50 years unless an extraordinary effort is made now. The number of smokers in the world will inexorably rise, principally because of population expansion.

Many countries, including developing countries, have already shown that smoking rates can be reduced. These successes can be reproduced by any responsible nation, but only through immediate, determined, and sustained governmental and community action. The future is uncertain and some of the events predicted here may never occur, but there must be the political will to tackle tobacco, and appropriate funding proportional to the magnitude of the epidemic, as well as individual commitment by smokers to quit. In the words of Norway's seasoned advocate Dr Kjell Bjartveit, "It can be done."

