



# **United Front: Against the Illicit Trade of Tobacco and E-Cigarettes**

**Communiqué — for public release**

On 11 December 2024, the Illicit Tobacco and E-cigarette (ITEC) Commissioner hosted a symposium in Melbourne bringing together over 80 representatives from across commonwealth, state and territory government agencies.

The purpose of the Symposium was to bring together all agencies working to combat illicit tobacco and e-cigarettes to explore the breadth and complexity of illicit tobacco and e-cigarettes in Australia, share information, knowledge and best practices on approaches, and collectively identify opportunities to collaborate further. It also provided a forum to hear key developments on emerging issues, trends and methodologies, and to connect with partners in a whole of government setting.

## **Context**

Participants recognised the significant and growing challenge in Australia posed by illicit tobacco and e-cigarette products. These illegal activities undermine public health objectives, threaten community safety, and create economic harm by fuelling organised crime and diverting resources from government. The complexity of this issue is evident in the diverse networks involved, which exploit regulatory gaps, cross-border vulnerabilities and the demand for cheaper alternatives. Criminal syndicates continue to adapt their operations, using sophisticated tactics to evade enforcement and further embed themselves in communities.

Participants agreed that addressing this issue requires a concerted effort across all levels of government. With extensive work already being undertaken by Commonwealth, state and territory agencies, it is clear that no single jurisdiction can tackle the problem alone. A more coordinated, whole of government approach is critical to disrupting these illegal markets effectively. Strong partnerships across law enforcement, regulatory bodies and public health agencies are vital to aligning strategies and ensuring a more joined up and unified approach.

## **Overview**

Addressing agencies the Minister for Health and Aged Care and the Minister for Home Affairs outlined key government priorities, emphasizing the need for collective action nationally to address the significant public health, safety and economic harms associated with these illegal markets. During the event, the Minister for Health and Aged Care announced \$107 million in additional Commonwealth funding to relevant Commonwealth agencies to double down on efforts on enforcement and interception of the illicit trade, including for the prosecutions, particularly supporting the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions.

The symposium provided a platform for agencies to share critical insights into the current threat environment, and participants heard first hand from the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission on trends, demographics and emerging challenges. The Australian Border Force underscored the challenges of stopping illicit tobacco at the border, emphasizing the adaptability of criminal syndicates and the need for enhanced international collaboration to address evolving threats.

Participants also acknowledged the role of regulatory reform and the importance of public health initiatives in reducing demand. The Therapeutic Goods Administration has led a series of public health reforms, and presented on the current state, emphasising the need for regulatory frameworks to be risk-based and data-driven. Treasury emphasised the effectiveness of pricing mechanisms in discouraging tobacco use, and the Australian Taxation Office signalled the ongoing cost of lost revenue due to organised crime. These presentations underscored the importance of balancing enforcement and compliance measures with demand-reduction strategies to achieve more effective outcomes.

Discussions across the event reinforced the need to strengthen sharing of information, best practices and operational coordination across jurisdictions. Lessons shared by agencies demonstrated the benefits of collaborative enforcement, targeted compliance initiatives and robust information sharing mechanisms. Victoria Police briefed agencies on the tactics used by organised crime syndicates within the Victorian illicit tobacco and e-cigarette environment, and highlighted recent successes of Taskforce LUNAR. South Australia's Consumer Business Services outlined progress in establishing its new regulatory function since 1 July 2024 and delivering a compliance and enforcement program. A roundtable discussion highlighted common challenges, opportunities for collaboration, and potential future initiatives to enhance joint efforts against these illegal activities.

The Symposium affirmed the importance of a sustained and unified response to the challenges of illicit tobacco and e-cigarettes. Participants committed to continuing dialogue and collaboration across all levels of government to build a more effective, joined up approach. This collective effort is vital to safeguarding public health, protecting communities, and dismantling the criminal networks that perpetuate these harmful markets.

## Participants

### Australian Capital Territory

- ACT Health

### New South Wales

- NSW Health
- NSW Police

### Northern Territory

- NT Health

### Western Australia

- Western Australian Department of Health
- Western Australia Police
- Department of Finance, Revenue WA

### South Australia

- South Australia, Consumer and Business Services
- South Australia Police

### Victoria

- Victoria Police
- Victoria Health
- Victoria Department of Justice and Community Safety

### Queensland

- Queensland Health
- Queensland Police

### Tasmania

- Tasmania Health
- Tasmania Police

### Commonwealth

- Minister for Home Affairs, The Hon Tony Burke MP (virtual address)
- Minister for Health and Aged Care, The Hon Mark Butler MP
- Office of the Illicit Tobacco and E-Cigarette Commissioner
- Australian Border Force
- Department of Health and Aged Care
- Therapeutic Goods Administration
- Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission
- Australian Taxation Office
- Australian Federal Police
- Department of Treasury
- Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions
- AUSTRAC