



MERCOSUR Intergovernmental Commission on Tobacco Control (ICTC)



The Tobacco Control Achievements in MERCOSUR Region¹

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Tobacco consumption is responsible for several diseases and over 5 million deaths each year around the world. This alarming set took 192 countries to discuss the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC), which aims the implementation of effective measures to control tobacco use expansion and its serious sanitary, social and economical consequences.



The Brazilian National Cancer Institute (INCA) has been the World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Center for tobacco control since 1997. In this context, INCA coordinates the Brazilian delegation in the MERCOSUR Intergovernmental Commission for Tobacco Control (ICTC).



Centro Colaborador da
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Programa Tabaco ou Saúde

This Commission was created in 2003 e since then several agreements were signed in the Health Ministers meetings, resulting in significant achievements for the national and regional tobacco control programs. Some of these measures must be highlighted: adoption of an integrated tobacco control policy and workplan; inclusion of the theme "medicines for tobacco cessation" in the MERCOSUR Drugs Policy; discussion about taxes harmonization; and intensification of the efforts for the WHO FCTC ratification by the countries.

During the last meeting, held in 2008 in Rio de Janeiro, during the Pro-Tempore Presidency of Brazil, the Commission has proposed an Agreement to be presented to MERCOSUR Health Ministers in order to strengthen international cooperation among countries to ban tobacco cross-border advertising, promotion and sponsorship. This proposal was made recognizing that international collaboration for a comprehensive cross-border advertising, promotion and sponsorship is an important area for tobacco control. Another resolution approved in this meeting was a project to establish a database with health warnings in cigarette packages.

The next subject planned to be discussed in the Committee is the medicines exchange for tobacco treatment dependence. For example, in Brazil treatment is free and is included in the Unified Health System based on a cognitive-behavioural approach, with pharmacological support when necessary (nicotine gum and patches and bupropion). Some MERCOSUR countries are reporting difficulties in acquiring smoking cessation drugs therefore a mechanism of cooperation is being considered to increase availability of such drugs for the population of the different MERCOSUR Countries.

Other significant development was reached during the Third Conference of the Parties, when MERCOSUR was accredited as an observer to the COP. With the observer status MERCOSUR can attend the public sessions of the Conference of the Parties or meetings of its subsidiary bodies with the right to speak presenting their views on the subjects on debate.

It is extremely important that neighborhood countries adopt similar legislation. In this regard, cooperation between MERCOSUR countries on the issue of illicit trade is a necessary condition for any significant decrease in illicit trade of tobacco products and also the adoption of taxes and prices measures.

Almost all MERCOSUR States Parties and Associated Countries have ratified the WHO FCTC (Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, Bolivia, Venezuela, Peru, Colombia, e Ecuador), except Argentina. Certainly, when all become Parties, the tobacco control policy in the region will be strengthened and other advances can be met.

The creation of an intergovernmental commission to advise MERCOSUR Health Ministers in the implementation of tobacco control measures was an important step forward in counteracting the epidemic among its countries. The periodical communication and meetings to evaluate actions and activities and to identify priority cooperation projects and research areas represent an unique opportunity to advance tobacco control in the region.

¹ Southern Common Market