

# China's Cigarette Health Warning Labels Still Behind Other Countries: Design and Branding Issues on Packs

## Background

In China, health warning labels (HWLs) on cigarette packs are text-only with just two messages in use and positioned at the bottom of the pack. We examined China's HWLs, focusing on elements of design and branding that may undermine their effectiveness.

## Methods

- 487 unique cigarette packs purchased in 2023 from five major Chinese cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing, Guangzhou, and Kunming) using the TPackSS (Tobacco Pack Surveillance System) systematic protocol
- Sample: 470 packs displaying HWLs currently mandated by China
- A detailed codebook was developed to assess design elements in the HWL area (e.g., color/pattern schemes, text to background contrast, branding, text direction, and HWL placement)
- Packs independently double-coded by two trained coders who were native Chinese speakers

# Branding and pack design can potentially **undermine the effectiveness** of health warning labels in China



## Results

- Colors/patterns that appeared on the pack were also found in the HWL area on almost all packs (90%—including all pictured packs)
- About one-quarter (27%) of packs featured branding directly below the HWLs (pictured, center)
- On 11% of packs, the HWL text lacked contrast against its background (pictured, left and yellow characters on right)
- Other concerning design elements included:
  - Use of multiple colors in HWL text and background (pictured, right)
  - HWL positioned in the flip-top opening area (pictured, center)

## Conclusions

- The prevalence of branding and design elements on cigarette packs that are carried into the HWL potentially diminishes the effectiveness of HWLs and makes the Chinese HWLs less prominent compared to FCTC best practices
- China could implement stricter HWL regulations to enhance the effectiveness of HWLs and align with FCTC Article 11



Learn more about the Tobacco Pack Surveillance System (TPackSS)

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