

MEDIA RELEASE

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Big tobacco tax tantrums lead to dirty ashtray gongs

British American Tobacco's (BAT) efforts to roll back taxes on tobacco, reframe regulation and rehabilitate its image, has earned it this year's Dirty Ashtray and Exploding Vape Awards.

It's the first time both awards — presented by the Australian Council on Smoking and Health (ACOSH) and the Australian Medical Association — have gone to the same organisation.

ACOSH and the AMA said the honours were awarded to BAT for its role in a "brazen resurgence" of tobacco industry interference in Australia's public debate.

AMA President Dr Danielle McMullen said BAT's win in the Dirty Ashtray category recognises the scale of its highly polished campaign to pressure Australia into lowering cigarette taxes.

"Through media appearances and commentary, BAT executives have reframed strong tobacco control as the cause of illicit trade while portraying tax cuts as a public good — claims at odds with independent evidence, but consistent with long-standing industry playbooks," Dr McMullen said.

The company's simultaneous win in the Exploding Vape category highlights the aggressive promotion of its so-called "smokeless" strategy, including vapes and heated tobacco products, under the banner of "harm reduction".

A central pillar of this strategy is BAT's Omni™ report, released in 2025 and promoted as a major scientific assessment of the evolution and harms of so-called "smokeless" tobacco products. BAT has described Omni™ as "a platform for a necessary societal conversation founded in evidence... a manifesto for change and a mandate for action".

But ACOSH CEO Laura Hunter said Omni™ collapses under scrutiny.

"BAT sold Omni™ as a serious scientific review. Our analysis shows it's anything but — it's a curated sales document dressed up as evidence," Ms Hunter said.

Contact: AMA Media: +61 427 209 753 media@ama.com.au



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“BAT’s dual win shows how the industry is working on multiple fronts: undermining taxes, pushing new nicotine products, and inserting itself into policy discussions under the guise of credibility. Australians deserve better than spin dressed up as expertise.”

Dr McMullen warned that the media must play a stronger role in identifying and disclosing industry influence.

“When industry-linked voices dominate the airwaves presented as neutral experts, it shapes public understanding in dangerous ways. It confuses people about the risks of smoking and vaping and distracts from evidence-based measures that save lives.”

Now in their 31st year, the Dirty Ashtray Awards were established by ACOSH and the AMA to expose those undermining tobacco control in Australia.

“Question your sources. Question who benefits,” Ms Hunter said. “When it comes to Australia’s conversation about nicotine, the last word should go to independent health experts — not the companies profiting from addiction.”

Media Contacts:

AMA: media@ama.com.au | 0427 209 753

ACOSH:

Sunday 7 December | Laura Hunter, CEO | 0415 295 403

Monday 8 December | Amy Howell, Communications Advisor | ahowell@acosh.org

0400 856 798

Contact: AMA Media: +61 427 209 753 media@ama.com.au



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