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Factsheet



Global



The Many Faces of Modern Addiction

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Front groups and allies help the tobacco industry spread its messages and grow sales

Tobacco companies use a number of creative ways to market their products and deliver their corporate narratives, including allies and front groups. From funding “grassroots” alliances to sponsoring high-profile sports teams, these tactics:

- Help deliver their messages to policymakers, the media and the public
- Give the appearance that their position has more support and credibility than it actually does
- Let the industry work around restrictions on policymakers interacting with the tobacco industry

As the tobacco industry pushes to addict a new generation of users to cigarettes and electronic products, known industry allies and new groups are appearing all over the world to promote the industry’s latest narratives.

There’s often a pattern of concealment, with links between these groups and the tobacco industry not fully or clearly disclosed. Sometimes, there are even active efforts to hide them. Policymakers, the media and the public need to know when they’re hearing from Big Tobacco in disguise. Who are some of the groups helping to build the next generation of addiction? Here are just a few examples:

1. World Vapers Alliance



Fake Grassroots / “Astroturf” campaign

World Vapers Alliance (WVA) says it is a grassroots lobbying campaign that “amplifies the voices of passionate vapers.” In fact, WVA promotes electronic nicotine products, many of which are [manufactured by the “big four”](#) transnational tobacco companies. Its website features pro-e-cigarette testimonials and research and it advertises on Facebook, though [reportedly](#) its ads rarely carry the group’s name. WVA engages in campaigns to lobby against regulation of e-cigarettes and for these products to be [included in health initiatives](#) like [Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan](#). A Daily Beast exposé reveals that it asked members to send “[seemingly organic letters](#)” [engineered by WVA](#), to pressure policymakers to roll back regulations like flavor bans, pricing policy and health warnings. This exposé also reveals that British American Tobacco (BAT) plays “a central and hands-on role in orchestrating, directing, and funding” WVA, which was [set up and is supported](#) by the Consumer Choice Center (CCC). Since CCC launched in 2017, it [has received funding](#) from BAT (for support of CCC’s “tobacco harm reduction advocacy”), Philip Morris International (PMI) and Japan Tobacco International (JTI).

Message and “voice”

WVA [presents itself](#) as a “grassroots” campaign that is giving voice to users of electronic nicotine products, while its [promotion and lobbying](#) in favor of these products advances the interests of tobacco companies including BAT, who talk about growing the “[nicotine consumer pool.](#)” Those [industry links aren’t disclosed](#), potentially hoodwinking policymakers and consumers into believing that this is a genuine consumer campaign.

2. Knowledge-Action-Change



FSFW grantee

Knowledge-Action-Change (K-A-C) is a grantee of the wholly PMI-funded [Foundation for a Smoke-Free World](#) (FSFW). K-A-C promotes [industry-friendly, anti-regulation messages](#), including the industry's self-interested definition of tobacco harm reduction, in industry-backed reports like the Global State of Tobacco Harm Reduction. It is vocal in [criticizing the World Health Organization](#) (WHO) and organizes [events](#) to coincide with WHO meetings in order to attract attention for outputs and commentators that are critical of WHO. K-A-C also organizes the Global Forum on Nicotine (GFN), manages the website Nicotine Science Policy and [gives grants](#) to others to promote its agenda. K-A-C, a private organization, received more than US \$5.2 million in [funding from FSFW](#) between 2017 and 2021. [FSFW's 2019 tax return](#) noted that it had allocated just under US \$6 million as "contributions approved for future payment" to K-A-C.

Message and "voice"

K-A-C tries to present itself as a "rational," [research-based authority](#) on tobacco harm reduction when in fact it has [longstanding industry links](#) and is advancing the industry's interests by undermining a global treaty designed to reduce tobacco use: the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). By funding its [own grantees](#)—increasing the number of entities funded by the tobacco industry—and involving them [alongside FSFW grantees](#) from around the world in its work and events, K-A-C is able to give an impression of global support for its positions.

3. International Network of Nicotine Consumer Organisations



Global Alliance

The International Network of Nicotine Consumer Organisations ([INNCO](#)) describes itself as a global coalition of non-profit consumer advocate organizations and predominantly advocates for [e-cigarette use](#). Since 2018, it has received [nearly US \\$1.2 million from FSFW](#) to advocate for the industry's self-interested definition of tobacco harm reduction, including [disseminating research developed by FSFW](#) and its partners. It only posted [information about its tobacco industry links](#) to its website in late 2020. Reportedly, one of INNCO's main targets was to engage with the United Nations and WHO and secure [civil society stakeholder status](#) at meetings of the parties to the WHO FCTC (known as the Conference of the Parties to the WHO FCTC, or "COP"). Its approaches, however, have been rebuffed ([most recently in 2021](#)) due to INNCO's tobacco industry links. Unable to access the COP, INNCO turned to [parallel events arranged by its allies](#) and to social media. [Research has revealed](#) that INNCO generated a significant proportion of Twitter activity around the time of COP related to newer nicotine and tobacco products and industry-friendly messaging on harm reduction. Its fellow FSFW grantee, K-A-C, [played a key role in establishing INNCO](#) as a lobbying organization and framing its position on harm reduction.

Message and "voice"

INNCO appears to position itself as a health focused civil society [group](#), aiming to secure legitimacy among global and national health stakeholders. Meanwhile, it acts as a conduit for [industry-linked research](#) and messaging to aid industry-friendly lobbying.

4. Comité interpartis contre l'interdiction de la publicité



National Alliance

In February 2022, Switzerland held a referendum on restricting tobacco advertising to protect children. PMI, BAT and JTI weren't named [in the list of "No" campaign \(Comité interpartis contre l'interdiction de la publicité\) partners](#), but they were there, just hidden: the generic-sounding [Swiss Cigarette](#) is an alliance of [PMI, BAT and JTI](#). During the campaign, [spokespeople for the "No" alliance](#) were from allied organizations like employers' groups, leaving the tobacco companies free to provide what looked like additional comment from outside the official campaign they were part of. In addition, the ["No" campaign website](#) included no information on its funders; PMI only [admitted funding the campaign](#) after media questions, but refused to disclose how much it was spending to stop a policy designed to protect children.

Message and "voice"

The "No" alliance delivered [business and financial messages](#) to oppose efforts to reduce tobacco use, portraying tobacco companies as economically beneficial and regulation as harmful to business and the economy. The "No" campaign also delivered alarmist, consumer-targeted messages, with [posters across Switzerland](#) warning people that if they voted in favor of restrictions on tobacco marketing, health advocates would seek to regulate favorite Swiss foods, like cake and sausages, next.

5. Clear the Smoke Campaign



Fake health campaign

While [Clear the Smoke](#) may look like a health campaign, it is a marketing campaign from Imperial Canada (a BAT company) designed to promote the company's electronic nicotine products and the tobacco industry's self-interested interpretation of tobacco harm reduction. It says it [aims to educate Canadians](#) by providing "accurate, credible and independent information" but content on the campaign's website is deceptive. The "facts" are carefully curated to deliver a pro-e-cigarette stance. It also features quotes from trusted health and tobacco control organizations like WHO, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids and ASH, who would never work with a tobacco company. However, the website presents selective quotes from these organizations, taken out of context so they appear to endorse e-cigarette use without any of the questions, concerns, qualifications and, typically, calls for strict regulation (that is typically opposed by the tobacco industry and its allies) clearly present in the original text, in what may be an attempt to give the campaign credibility.

Message and "voice"

The "campaign" presents as an [expert health and scientific voice](#), aiming to support harm reduction and aligned with global health and tobacco control experts, while actually being a commercially motivated PR campaign to promote the industry's products and self-serving definition of tobacco harm reduction.

6. McLaren Formula 1 (F1) Team



Sponsorships

Tobacco companies are also using music and sports sponsorships to promote their products and messages. For example, BAT sponsors the McLaren F1 team to [reach F1's global audience, including its growing number of young fans](#). Critically, it does not promote the BAT corporate brand, which has a clear connection to tobacco, using corporate messages like "[A Better Tomorrow](#)" and branding for its electronic nicotine products and nicotine pouches instead. Association with the glamorous, globe-trotting and technology-driven sport can make these products appear desirable and distract from the fact that BAT is predominantly a cigarette company. The McLaren team, which is paid tens of millions of dollars by BAT each season, [helps the company perpetuate its misleading transformation narrative](#) while it continues to make hundreds of billions of cigarettes every year.

Message and "voice"

The McLaren F1 team acts as a conduit to deliver a positive narrative about BAT—including referring to the tobacco giant as a [part of the McLaren "family"](#) and positions the company's activities in [a technology-driven context](#). Critically, it also [enables BAT to engage](#) directly with McLaren's passionate fan base and benefit from global platforms that reach youth.

Conclusion

The tobacco industry has deep pockets. Its narratives and products are promoted for profit all around the world, through different types of organizations and activities. One common pattern is that links to the industry are not always clear, including the use of brand names and messages that audiences may not associate with tobacco. Policymakers and the public should look deeper when they hear a message that appears to support the tobacco industry's positions and products and reject both organizations that are overtly linked to the industry and those that they find are aligned with and funded by the industry.



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About STOP (Stopping Tobacco Organizations and Products)

STOP is a global tobacco industry watchdog whose mission is to expose the tobacco industry strategies and tactics that undermine public health. STOP is funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies and comprised of a partnership among the Tobacco Control Research Group (TCRG) at the University of Bath, The Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control (GGTC), the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union) and Vital Strategies. For more information, visit exposetobacco.org.