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The Principal Research Officer  
Education and Health Standing Committee  
Legislative Assembly  
Parliament House  
PERTH WA 6000

2 February 2009

Dear Principal Research Officer

**Re: Inquiry into the Tobacco Products Control Amendment Bill 2008.**

I am writing to express the support of HBF for the proposed changes to the Tobacco Products Control Act 2006 in its current form.

With over 880,000 members, the HBF Group is Western Australia's leading health insurer and has been supporting the health and wellbeing of Western Australians for nearly 70 years. Our vision is to lead the way in improving the health and wellbeing of everyone in the West Australian community.

Moreover, HBF's Community Health Advocacy Program specifically seeks to address recognised chronic health conditions, including cancer and heart disease by encouraging Western Australians to adopt healthier lifestyles, including quitting smoking, to help avoid these conditions. We have formed a number of community health partnerships with key health groups, including the National Heart Foundation and the Cancer Council, to work together to achieve these goals.

It is well established that smoking is the single biggest preventable cause of death and disease in Western Australia and we believe the community is entitled to protection from the harmful effects of tobacco smoke and the tobacco industry's continual effort to promote cigarettes.

Currently, 14.8 per cent of West Australian's aged 14 years and over smoke and while it is encouraging that there has been a declining trend overall, smoking still kills more than 1400 Western Australians each year and results in 67,370 hospital bed days. Research indicates that smoking costs Western Australia over \$2.4 billion per year, with individuals and businesses bearing the majority of these costs. HBF incurs many of these costs through claims made from smoking related conditions. While we aim to keep premium levels as low as possible for our members, these significant costs ultimately negatively contribute to premium levels charged to our members.

In addition to the fact that one in two regular smokers will die because of their smoking, passive smoking is also a cause of premature death and disease in people who do not smoke. Even small amounts of exposure to tobacco smoke can be harmful to people's health. Eleven deaths and 6,750 hospital bed days are caused by passive smoking each year and over 96 per cent of all hospital costs arising from passive smoking are attributable to children under the age of 15.

The introduction of legislation outlined in the Bill will not only protect children and adults from passive smoking but will also encourage smokers to quit and assist them to remain quit. The vast majority of West Australians don't want to be subjected to passive smoke and the public is supportive that outdoor areas where people gather be smoke-free. Research commissioned by the Cancer Council WA shows that 84 per cent of non-smokers are in support of a ban on smoking in alfresco areas. Results also indicated strong community support for banning smoking in vehicles carrying children with 87 per cent of the community in favour of the legislation.

We believe that the introduction of this legislation is vital to the health and wellbeing of the West Australian community to protect them from the well-established effects of tobacco smoke.

Yours sincerely



Rob Bransby  
Managing Director