# Provincial, local govts’ role critical in reducing smoking prevalence: ARI

ISLAMABAD, 11 March, 2025: The role of the provincial and local governments is critical in ensuring an effective and accessible cessation services mechanism across Pakistan to reduce the prevalence of smoking.

“Smoking cessation services play a critical role in helping smokers quit,” said Arshad Ali Syed, project director of Alternative Research Initiative. “After the 18th constitutional amendment, the provincial governments have to take the lead on providing effective and affordable smoking cessation services.”

Provincial governments now have the authority to design and implement tailored health programs that address the unique needs of their populations. This includes establishing smoking cessation clinics, promoting awareness campaigns, and integrating cessation services into existing healthcare systems at the district and tehsil levels. By leveraging their autonomy, provincial administrations can ensure that adult smokers, especially those in underserved areas, have access to the support they need to quit smoking.

He added that a country with more than 31 million tobacco users urgently required smoking cessation services. “Without reaching out to smokers, the issue of smoking prevalence cannot be addressed.”

Though Pakistan ratified the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) in 2004, it is still one of the countries with a heavy burden of disease because of combustible smoking. Two in five smokers in Pakistan start cigarette smoking before the age of 10 years. Today Pakistan has more than 31 million adults (15 years and above) who are tobacco users. Of them, 17 million adults currently smoke cigarettes. On average a smoker consumes 13 cigarettes a day. Worryingly, the implementation of laws and regulations regarding tobacco control remains weak.

Arshad said the local governments, as the administrative backbone of communities, play a pivotal role in this effort. “Their proximity to the population enables them to implement grassroots initiatives, such as community-based counseling programs, school awareness campaigns, and enforcement of anti-smoking laws.”

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# Alternative Research Initiative (ARI)

ARI provides research-based solutions in social fields, including health, education, governance, culture, etc. in Pakistan. Established in 2018, ARI offers analytical research and outreach services, identifying and analyzing social issues, to provide long-term practical innovative solutions, both for public and private sectors. Over the last two years, ARI has conducted countrywide surveys and research studies on various health issues.

# Our work

ARI is working on ending combustible smoking in a generation in Pakistan. While remaining committed to and supporting tobacco control efforts in Pakistan, especially Article 14 of FCTC, ARI serves as a platform for advocating and promoting all innovative solutions for ending smoking whether counseling, NRTs, or harm reduction.

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