

Introduction of a minimum legal age of sale of 21 for tobacco in Ireland – results from a rapid review of evidence

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Section 1: What?

- ‘Tobacco 21’ is a user-focused legislative measure that aims to reduce or delay smoking initiation among younger people.
- This study aimed to conduct an exploratory rapid review of evidence on Tobacco 21.

Section 2: How?



Section 3: Where and when?

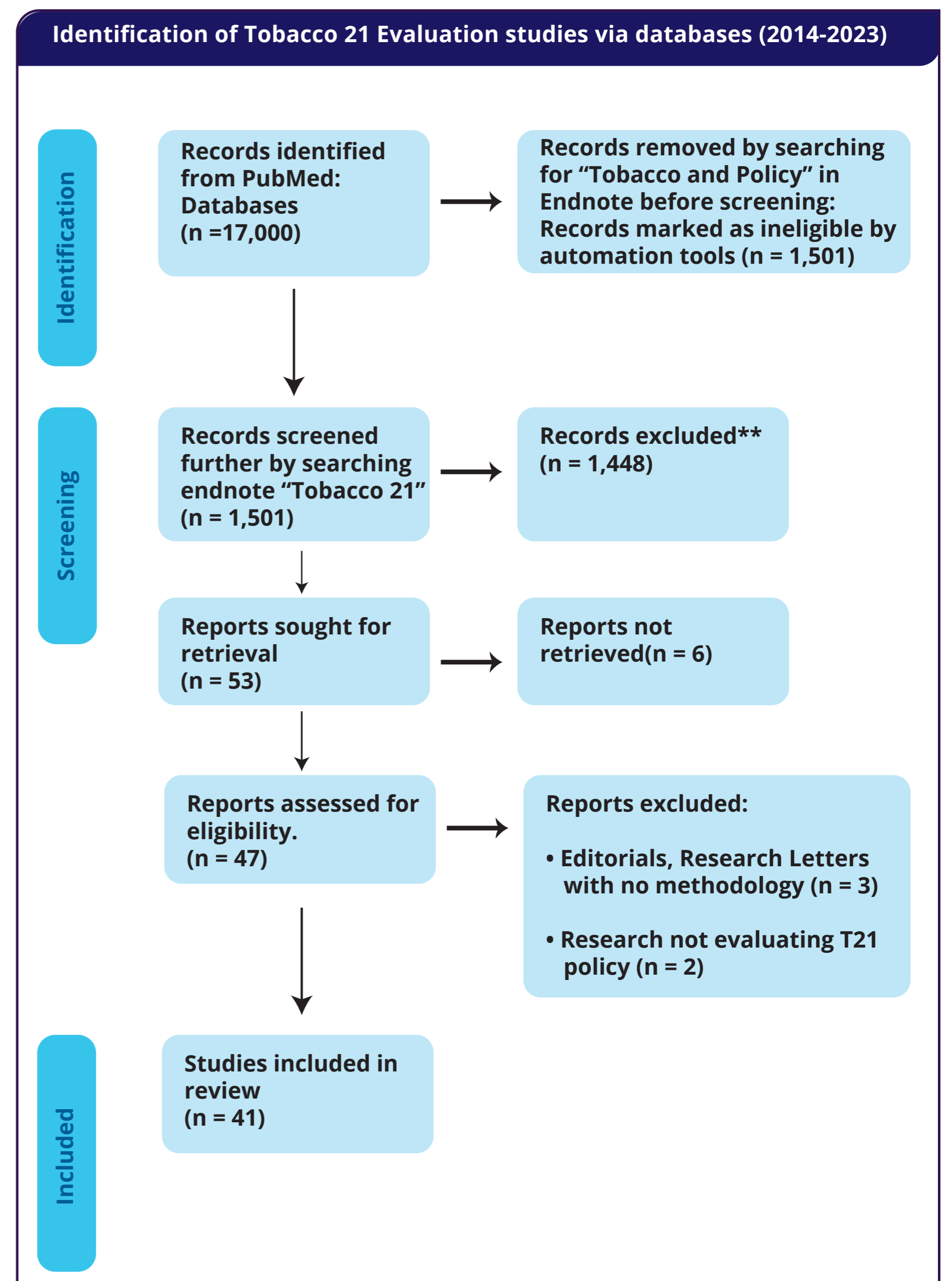
In 2019, the USA became the largest country to implement federal T21 legislation. Other countries including Sri Lanka (2006), Mongolia (2013), Uganda (2016) Ethiopia (2019) have implemented the policy.

Section 4: Why?

- Ireland’s Tobacco Free Ireland policy sets a goal of less than 5% smoking prevalence.
- The latest survey data suggest Ireland may be losing ground in terms of reducing smoking prevalence among children.
- A 2019 analysis of European Schools Project for Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) data found that the previous decline in smoking has halted in Irish teens for the first time in 25 years (14%) and rates have significantly increased to 16% in boys.¹
- Longitudinal data shows significant changes in smoking in early Irish adulthood, with rates of occasional and daily smoking almost doubling between the ages of 17/18, and 20 years old.²
- There is strong support for tobacco endgame measures such as T21 among the Irish population. An HSE-commissioned national survey found that 71% of those over 15-year-olds are in favour of the policy.³

Categorization of Rapid Review Studies	
Policy Development & Framing	11
Policy Impact on Behaviour of Underage Youth & Young Adults	22
Policy Impact - Economic Impact	3
Policy Implementation & Enforcement	5
TOTAL	41

Section 5: Methodology



Section 6: Findings

- All studies used either US or UK data
- Some looked at a range of end outcomes (smoking accessibility, intention to use, uptake), process outcomes (implementation, feasibility, enforcement), and framing within media and political narratives.
- Two population representative modeling studies from the USA and UK found that T21 can substantially reduce the number of young adults who smoke. The UK study found that those from more disadvantaged backgrounds would be served by the policy.
- Most studies demonstrated a reduction in youth smoking and tobacco sales. However, one longitudinal study did not demonstrate a reduction.
- One study reported an unintended benefit of the measure - a reduction in smoking during pregnancy among 18-21-year-olds.

Section 7: Conclusion

Tobacco 21 is being proposed as a ‘brake’ response to the documented stalling of progress in reducing youth smoking in Ireland and it enjoys broad public support in Ireland. Our review suggests that pre- and post-evaluation studies generally conclude that the measure is successful in reducing the accessibility and uptake of tobacco among young people. Background effects in terms of increased uptake of e-cigarettes and dual use may be a factor in the interpretation of findings. A further systematic review, evidence synthesis, and meta-analysis are needed to formally assess the quality of the published evidence and estimate potential effect sizes.



Access the report here:
Tobacco free Ireland: time for tobacco 21