

Vaping - An inquiry into reducing rates of e-cigarette use in Queensland

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I am writing to express my concerns about the Australian government's National Tobacco Strategy 2023-2030, particularly the proposed ban on vaping, which restricts the sale of vapes to pharmacies and limits the flavours to tobacco. This submission discusses the role of fear and propaganda in shaping these regulations, contrasts Australia's approach with those of the UK and New Zealand, and calls for evidence-based vaping regulations that prioritize public health over political agendas. Fear and propaganda seem to be driving the proposed vaping regulations more than solid scientific evidence. Policymakers and health officials often cite concerns about youth uptake and the potential health risks of vaping as reasons for the restrictive measures. While it is crucial to address these issues, it is also vital to consider the broader context of tobacco harm reduction and the potential benefits of vaping as a cessation tool for adult smokers. In contrast to Australia's approach, both the UK and New Zealand have adopted more progressive policies on vaping. Public health authorities in these countries encourage smokers to switch to vaping as a less harmful alternative. The UK's National Health Service (NHS) and Public Health England (PHE) have endorsed e-cigarettes as a cessation tool, with PHE stating that e-cigarettes are 95% less harmful than smoking (McNeill et al., 2015). Similarly, New Zealand's Ministry of Health has launched a campaign promoting vaping as a viable alternative for smokers looking to quit. These policies are rooted in evidence and emphasize the potential of vaping as a tobacco harm reduction tool. To develop effective vaping regulations, the Australian government must base its policies on a thorough and balanced assessment of the available evidence. While it is essential to address the potential risks associated with vaping, such as youth uptake, it is equally important to consider the benefits of vaping as a cessation tool for adult smokers. A more nuanced approach could involve banning or more tightly regulating disposable e-cigarettes, which are easier to use and may be more attractive to young people. At the same time, low-dose refillable nicotine e-liquids could be made available for sale at vape stores, as these products require more effort to use, making them less appealing to young people who may find it difficult to refill their devices. While it is understandable that concerns may arise about the appeal of flavoured e-liquids to children, it is crucial to recognize that these flavours also play an essential role in supporting adult vapers in their journey to quit combustible tobacco. The wide variety of flavours available for e-cigarettes can make the vaping experience more enjoyable and satisfying for adult smokers transitioning away from traditional cigarettes. This increased satisfaction can help to prevent relapse by reducing the temptation to return to the familiar taste and smell of combustible tobacco products. Therefore, any regulatory approach to e-liquid flavours should carefully balance the need to protect young people from becoming attracted to vaping with the importance of providing adult smokers with an effective and palatable alternative to smoking. I would also like to express my concerns that restricting the sale of nicotine-containing vapes to pharmacies may essentially result in a de facto ban if no approved vapes are made available at these locations. This situation would closely mirror the current predicament surrounding CBD availability in Australia. Despite being made legal for over-the-counter purchase at pharmacies in 2021, no CBD products have been approved for sale to this date. Consequently, CBD remains effectively inaccessible for the general population. If the government does not approve and ensure the availability of nicotine-containing vapes in pharmacies, the proposed restrictions could inadvertently create a similar situation, depriving smokers of a potentially life-saving alternative to traditional cigarettes, bolstering the black market and undermining the tobacco harm reduction goals of the National Tobacco Strategy 2023-2030. It is important to note that, currently, the vaping market in Australia is predominantly comprised of independent manufacturers and retailers, with no significant

presence of products owned by Big Tobacco. However, by restricting the sale of nicotine-containing vapes to pharmacies, the Australian government may unintentionally create an environment in which Big Tobacco companies can gain a foothold in the vaping industry. These large corporations have the financial resources and influence to navigate the regulatory landscape and push for their products to be approved for sale in pharmacies. As a result, this regulatory change could inadvertently provide Big Tobacco with an opportunity to monopolize the market, undermining the diverse and independent landscape of the current Australian vaping industry. In conclusion, I urge the Queensland government to prioritize evidence-based vaping regulations in the National Tobacco Strategy 2023-2030. Fear and propaganda should not drive public health policy; instead, the government must consider the successful approaches adopted by countries like the UK and New Zealand. By implementing balanced, evidence-based vaping regulations, Australia can effectively promote tobacco harm reduction while addressing legitimate concerns about youth uptake and public health. Thank you for considering my submission. I look forward to your response and the opportunity to contribute to the development of more effective vaping regulations in Australia.