

Tobacco and Other Smoking Products (Dismantling Illegal Trade) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Submission No:	23
Submitted by:	Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine
Publication:	Making the submission and your name public
Attachments:	See attachment
Submitter Comments:	

ACRRM Submission on the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products (Dismantling Illegal Trade) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry. As a national medical college and advocacy organisation we have limited our responses to where we can provide a national advocacy perspective.

These reflect our overarching policy point of view, rather than those of our individual members who might provide localised clinical insights.

About the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM)

ACRRM's vision is *healthy rural, remote and First Nations communities through excellence, social accountability and innovation*.

The College works to define, promote and deliver quality standards of medical practice for rural, remote and First Nations communities through a skilled and dedicated Rural Generalist profession. We provide a quality Fellowship program including training, professional development, and clinical practice standards; and support advocacy services for rural doctors and the communities they serve.

ACRRM has more than 5000 rural doctor members including some 1200 registrars, who live and work in rural, remote, and First Nations communities across Australia. Our members provide expert front line medical care in a diverse range of settings including general practices, hospitals, emergency departments, Aboriginal Medical Services, and other remote settings such as the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) and the Australian Antarctic Division.

Response to the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products (Dismantling Illegal Trade) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

The College welcomes the objective of the Bill to protect public health by reducing the supply and possession of illicit tobacco and illicit nicotine products. The view of the College is that the use of harmful substances should be treated as a health issue.

In terms of the response to this Bill, the College does not propose to comment on the associated objectives regarding increased powers and offences that are part of this Bill, but to focus on the importance of reducing the use of harmful substances in the community.

Government actions to reduce access to tobacco products is welcome as *tobacco use is responsible for more deaths in Australia than alcohol and illicit drugs combined and causes more deaths than any other behavioural risk factor*.¹ Furthermore, action on illicit nicotine products is required as there has been an overall increase in the use of e-cigarettes by Australians from 0.05% in 2016 to 3.5% in 2022-23 with a substantial increase in use among the younger generation.²

In February 2024 the College published a position statement on harmful substances which is available on the ACRRM website³, and notes: *Smoking, vaping, alcohol, and illicit drug use combined contributed to over 16% of the total burden of disease, and to 18% of deaths in Australia in 2018. Substance use disorders are strongly associated with social disadvantage. Consequently, people living in lower socio-economic areas, including in rural and remote parts of Australia, experience a greater burden from these risk factors.*

Harmful substance use should be regarded primarily as a health issue which should be treated through a range of strategies including addressing its underlying causes, encouraging help-seeking behaviours, and increasing contact with the health care system.

Programs are needed to address substance use disorders in rural and remote areas. These must be targeted, to address the unique issues faced by rural and remote and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; tailored to their specific needs; and delivered in a culturally appropriate manner. In addition, they must incorporate strategies to address the underlying inequalities in health and social outcomes of the most disadvantaged.

ACRRM supports measures that will continue to decrease harmful substance use through a reduction in the supply and availability of illicit tobacco and illicit nicotine products.

Although the focus of this Bill is seeking to increase the powers and offences provisions available to restrict access to these products, the Committee should consider the broader healthcare needs of rural and regional Australians by providing greater assistance to those seeking to quit smoking or vaping.

Rural Generalists in some locations are the only point of assistance in treating harm reduction caused by these products, and ACRRM is supportive of Government actions that reduce the supply of illicit tobacco and illicit nicotine products into communities.

Noting the short timeframes for the consultation of this Bill, it is clear, that immediate action on this issue is expected from government; but it is expected that the health outcomes of our community should be first and foremost in the finalisation of this Bill.

ACRRM Rural Generalists continue to provide excellent healthcare and advice to Australians across a diverse range of environments and locations, but an ongoing focus by all governments in assisting our Rural Generalists support their communities' health and welfare broader than the measures contained within this Bill is essential.

¹ Australia's health 2024: in brief p39 <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/6b19e493-0ebe-420f-a9a3-e48b26aace9f/aihw-aus-249-ib.pdf?v=20240715154739&inline=true>

² Ibid p40

³ ACRRM position statement on Harmful Substances https://www.acrrm.org.au/docs/default-source/all-files/college-position-statement---harmful-substance-use---feb-2024.pdf?sfvrsn=58332a2d_12

The College looks forward to the consideration of this Bill by the Committee, and publication of the final report.

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ACRRM acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the custodians of the lands and waters where our members and staff work and live across Australia. We pay respect to their elders, lores, customs and Dreaming. We recognise these lands and waters have always been a place of teaching, learning, and healing.