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01/11/2020

Senate Committee on Tobacco Harm Reduction
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Dear Sir/Madam

Key Points

- 1) International experience and research show vaping to be at least 95% less harmful than smoking
- 2) International experience and data shows that in countries where vaping is legal and supported smoking rates are falling faster than in Australia where rates have been relatively stagnant since 2013.
- 3) International research shows vaping is NOT a gateway into smoking.
- 4) A legalised regulated regime will bring Australia into line with New Zealand and other OECD countries except Turkey.

I have been a practicing GP for over 30 years and over that time have seen much misery and illness related to smoking.

Three years ago, I made a submission to regards the Vaporized Nicotine Products bill 2017. The minority report by Trent Zimmerman MHR was succinct in concluding "Life is short, shorter for smokers just legalise vaping".

Since then little has changed in Australia. However, New Zealand has introduced a regulatory framework for vaping making it essentially no harder for smokers to access an at least 95% less harmful alternative.

To quote from the [NZ Ministry of Health](#)

The Ministry of Health considers vaping products have the potential to make a contribution to the [Smokefree 2025](#) goal and could disrupt the significant inequities that are present.

That smoking is not healthy is a given and quitting is obviously recommended. Smoking rates have declined sharply since the late 1950's when over half the population smoked. Today in Australia around 14% of adult's smoke with some estimates of as few as 5% of teenagers doing so.

However, in disadvantaged groups such as Indigenous, those with mental health problems, the homeless and single mothers to name a few, smoking rates are far above the national average. The recent ANU review noted that smoking rates in the Indigenous population was 40%. This was "spun" as a positive in that it was under 50%. In reality it is a disgrace that it is three times the national average. The rates are well above 50% in those with schizophrenia.

Various stop smoking aids have come onto the market over the last 25 years but it is notable that a review of [over 600 papers](#) on stopping smoking showed that the most effective way to quit smoking is to simply throw away the pack. Around 70% of smokers quit smoking unaided. Not always the first time but they get there. Since the 1960's, 90% of those who have quit did so unaided.

The reviewers noted that; "...paradoxically the tobacco control community treats this information as if it was somehow irresponsible or subversive". They added, "...smoking cessation is becoming pathologised, a development that risks distortion of public awareness of how most smokers quit to the benefit of the pharmaceutical industry".

"Cold turkey" does not make money for anyone. In particular there would be no government funding for running programs or promotions if people can quit without them. Whilst some people benefit from assistance most do not.

Some stop smoking medications can have significant side effects. In the USA there is a class action over one of these due to its link to suicide.

E-cigarettes are relatively cheap and side effect free. They help smokers quit. It is critical to note that whilst cigarettes are carcinogenic, nicotine by itself is not. Nicotine can be purchased without prescription in gum, spray and patch form variably at supermarkets and chemists.

An independent scientific review commissioned by Public Health England, found E-cigarettes to be [95% less harmful](#) than regular cigarettes.

If smokers simply switched to E-cigarettes, they are 95% better off. Talking to patients I have found that many who have quit using them are passionate about their use.

Researchers from [University College London](#) found that; "E-cigarettes appear to be helping a significant number of smokers to stop who would not have done otherwise - not as many as some e-cigarette enthusiasts claim, but a substantial number".

For reasons that are not clear the public health lobby, which is so against vaping, has the ear of regulators. One argument is that they lead people into smoking. The UCL team found "Regular use of e-cigarettes by never smokers is extremely rare, and the decline in smoking prevalence in young people has been as great or greater than in previous years". A US [survey of teens](#) showed that two thirds do not even use nicotine in their vaping.

Nicotine poisoning is raised a concern. Nicotine liquid, like laundry bleach, pesticides and button batteries must be kept out of the reach of children. Proper regulation would mean safe packaging, including child proof bottles. Currently there is no regulation around packaging.

Another argument is that tobacco manufacturers have moved into this space. It should not be a surprise that an industry with a product in terminal sales decline would look for new products to sell.

Some vaping supporters have expressed a more cynical view. That is because e-cigarette use, is self-initiated (like cold turkey) it threatens the whole stop smoking industry, which hence wants it banned. Maybe the name E-cigarette is the problem - being too close to cigarette.

And while the health department congratulates itself, people can buy them online anyway. Banning sales does not actually mean they can't be obtained.

E-cigarettes offer smokers a useful option, which is safer, and at least as effective and possibly more effective than some existing, stop smoking aids. International experience shows vaping to be the preferred option of quitting by smokers. It is a non- medicalised model and thus less expensive to government.

In addition, they have a superior safety profile with respect to side effects. Many will use e-cigarettes for a time and then stop all together. At absolute worst if smokers convert to e-cigarettes and continue to use them, they are using a product 95% less harmful than cigarettes.

I trust that all this will be taken into account in this review. In particular the benefits to smokers of being able to quit entirely or at least switching to a 95% less harmful alternative should be given greater weight than the entrenched positions of some in public health.

Yours Sincerely

Dr Joe Kosterich