

Proposal 1: Seize the huge opportunity presented by low-risk nicotine products

Recommendation 1. Revolutionize tobacco and nicotine policy, reduce healthcare spending and improve health by exploiting the very large difference in risk to human health caused by combustible and smoke-free products. Make appointments and provide direction and funding to embed this in federal agencies such as FDA, CDC, NIH and Office of the Surgeon General as well as the highest levels of the Department of Health and Human Services

Current tobacco policy is mired in obsolete themes, confusion about goals and denial about highly positive developments in the marketplace¹. The overwhelming majority of the risk associated with tobacco use comes from tobacco smoke and combustion, not from nicotine. Nicotine is a mildly psychoactive drug that can be addictive, but addictiveness depends on how fast, in what form, and how much is delivered. However, nicotine itself is not particularly harmful. It is the tobacco smoke that holds and transports the nicotine to the lungs where it is absorbed that is the cause of cancer, cardiovascular and respiratory illnesses. Combusted tobacco smoke is the most effective delivery system for nicotine, but there are products that deliver a nicotine experience that is nearly as satisfying *but without the smoke* – and therefore with greatly reduced health risks. These products have four main generic forms:



1. E-cigarettes and vaping products. These create much lower exposures to toxic agents^{2 3 4} and are likely to be at least 95% lower risk than smoking^{5 6}.
2. Heated tobacco products, in which a vapor is created by heating but not burning tobacco. These products are likely to be at least 90% lower risk than smoking^{7 8 9 10}.
3. Unheated nicotine products, such as lozenges, films, inhalers and some forms of pharmaceutical nicotine replacement therapy (NRT). These are likely to approximate to NRT in their risk profile.
4. Smokeless tobacco such as well-established products like snus, which is likely to be at least 98% lower risk than smoking¹¹ and has been responsible for the lowest levels of smoking in the developed world in Sweden¹² and significant health gains¹³.

These smoke-free nicotine products have become viable consumer market competitors to smoking with a small fraction of the risk. They may not be completely safe - very little is - but the fundamental physical and chemical processes involved mean these products will be very much less harmful than smoking. Therein lies a vast untapped opportunity for both health and potentially reducing healthcare costs by “billions of dollars”¹⁴. As a study of the fiscal effects of tobacco harm reduction focused on the state of Indiana concluded¹⁵:

Making [e-cigarettes] more expensive for or unavailable to consumers is misguided because switching to [e-cigarettes] from combustible cigarettes leads to improved health outcomes for cigarette smokers. Over time, this will lower the substantial amount of state funds that are spent on public healthcare programs such as Medicaid.

The emergence of these products suggests a major rethink of nicotine policy is due and that it should be conducted based on new governing principles and civil dialogue – a process that is well advanced¹⁶.

References

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