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Craig McKeough
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Craig.mckeough@wanews.com.au

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Why the Eliminate Cancer Initiative will increase cancer rates

Associate Professor Colin Mendelsohn
Chairman, Australian Tobacco Harm Reduction Association (<https://athra.org.au>)
School of Public Health and Community Medicine, University of New South Wales, Sydney

Andrew Forrest's [Eliminate Cancer Initiative](#) (ECI) was established to reduce cancer. Perversely, its campaign to ban e-cigarettes will increase cancer rates in Australia.

The ECI [proposal](#) prioritises the risks of vaping to young people. However, in doing so it denies millions of addicted Australian smokers access to a far safer alternative which has the potential to save many thousands of lives.

Complete cessation of all tobacco and nicotine is always the preferred goal. However, many smokers are not able to quit with conventional treatment and vaping provides a far less harmful alternative. It delivers nicotine and a 'smoking-like' experience, without the smoke which causes most of the harm to health.

Vaping is now the most popular quitting aid in the [United Kingdom](#), the [United States](#) and the [European Union](#).

The Eliminate Cancer Initiative approach is based on several false premises:

'Vaping is a gateway to cigarettes for young people'

The gateway theory [remains unproven](#), however if there is an effect it is likely to be very small indeed. It is possible that some non-smoking young people who would not otherwise have smoked, will try vaping and progress to smoking. However, this small cost needs to be balanced against the [substantial improvement](#) in public health from helping adult smokers to quit.

Most vaping by young people is experimental and short lived. In the [largest study to date](#) of over 60,000 teenagers in the UK, only 0.1-0.5% of those who had never smoked became regular (weekly) vapers and there was little evidence of progression to smoking. Regular vaping (at least weekly) was rare and was almost exclusively confined to current smokers.

Many studies have found that some young people try vaping before they try smoking. However, this does not prove that vaping causes smoking. It is more likely that young people who are [more likely to experiment](#) with vaping are also more likely to try smoking.

As vaping rates have been increasing in young people in many countries, smoking rates have been declining rapidly, in some cases faster than ever. The evidence suggests that [vaping is replacing—rather than encouraging—smoking](#) of tobacco cigarettes among young people and is reducing smoking uptake.

‘E-cigarettes are not an effective quitting aid’

There is now good evidence that e-cigarettes have helped millions of smokers to quit. [Over 6 million people](#) reported quitting smoking with an e-cigarette in the European Union alone and [nearly 3 million](#) in England.

Studies in large populations in both the [US](#) and [UK](#) have found that smokers who use e-cigarettes to quit have **significantly higher quit rates** than those who don’t. Daily users are 3-8 times more likely to quit than non-users in recent studies in the US [here](#) and [here](#).

‘E-cigarettes are a tobacco company ploy to addict teenagers’

Nothing could be further from the truth. Vaping is a grassroots, consumer-led movement by smokers trying to reduce the harm from smoking. Big Tobacco is a late arrival and owns less than 10% of the e-cigarette market in the US. No e-cigarettes made by Big Tobacco are sold in Australia, Canada or New Zealand.

Other supporters of vaping include the [Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists](#), the UK [Royal College of Physicians](#), the [American Cancer Society](#) and the [British Heart Foundation](#). Are they also trying to addict teenagers?

What about cancer?

Smoking is the leading preventable cause of cancer in Australia. Many smokers try and fail repeatedly to quit and remain at high risk of cancer and other smoking-related diseases.

Smokers who switch to vaping are exposed to ‘far lower levels of carcinogens (cancer-causing agents) and other toxic compounds’ than smoking according to the [American Cancer Society](#).

Another study funded by the world’s largest cancer charity, Cancer Research UK, found that when smokers switch to vaping, there is a substantial reduction in [carcinogens retained in the body](#) compared to tobacco smokers.

It is therefore no surprise that the overall cancer risk from long-term vaping has been estimated at [less than 0.5% of the risk from smoking](#). The risk of lung cancer from passive vaping was calculated to be [100,000 times less than from smoking](#).

While well intentioned, The Eliminate Cancer Initiative’s proposal will remove an effective and popular quitting aid and perpetuate tobacco smoking and all its harmful effects. It denies adult smokers access to a safer alternative which could be lifesaving.

Australia needs a balanced policy that protects young people, such as a minimum age of sale and responsible advertising, while supporting vaping for adult smokers who are otherwise unable to quit. Modelling studies have shown that the [overall public health benefit](#) of such a policy would be substantial.

What is ATHRA?

Australian Tobacco Harm Reduction Association (ATHRA) is a registered health promotion charity established to reduce the harm from tobacco smoking in Australia. ATHRA's aim is to provide smokers and health professionals with evidence-based information on safer alternatives to smoking. ATHRA's broader goal is to encourage the complete cessation of tobacco smoking in Australia.

Colin Mendelsohn and ATHRA have no commercial or financial relationship with any tobacco company or their subsidiaries.

<https://athra.org.au>