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## MEDIA RELEASE

### Australia smokers denied potentially lifesaving strategies

“Safer nicotine products have the potential to be one of the most dramatic public health coups of modern times, at no cost to governments”, according to a new international report on reducing the global harm from smoking. However, Australian smokers are missing out.

The report, ‘No Fire, No Smoke’ (1) reviews the global state of ‘safer nicotine products’ such as nicotine vaporisers (e-cigarettes), heated tobacco products and Swedish snus. These products allow smokers who are unable to quit to continue using nicotine without also inhaling the cancer-producing chemicals found in cigarette smoke. All these products are effectively banned in Australia.

The report was welcomed by the Australian Tobacco Harm Reduction Association. Chairman, Associate Professor Colin Mendelsohn explained that “the ‘quit or die approach is no longer the only option for smokers who want to be smokefree. For smokers who cannot quit, switching to safer nicotine products is potentially lifesaving.”

“International evidence shows these products help smokers quit and are far safer for the smoker and bystanders” Professor Mendelsohn said. “Why should Australian smokers be denied access?”

Australia is one of the 39 countries that have “inappropriately banned” safer nicotine products. “A consumer can vape nicotine reasonably freely in the USA, UK and New Zealand, but faces fines or imprisonment in Thailand and Australia,” the report says.

The report is also very critical of the World Health Organisation (WHO) which meets this week in Geneva, Switzerland for its biennial conference on tobacco. According to Professor Gerry Stimson of Knowledge Action Change (London) which commissioned the report, “WHO does not comply with its own [international treaty obligations](#) (2) that oblige member countries to adopt the harm-reduction approach of encouraging safer nicotine products. This is a tragic missed opportunity to stop one billion lives being claimed by smoking this century,”

Trent Zimmerman MP who chaired the Australian parliamentary inquiry into vaping agrees. His view is quoted in the report, “If long term smokers who have been unable to quit smoking tobacco cigarettes switch to e-cigarettes, thousands of lives could be saved.”

The report authors also argue that safer nicotine products are more than a health and safety issue. They are also a human rights issue. “Smokers should not be denied access to harm reduction products that will help them avoid disease and early death”.

“It is clear that the risks of vaping are lower than cigarettes, probably much, much lower. Governments shouldn’t create barriers which stop smokers switching to vaping, they should make that switch as easy as possible for smokers unable or unwilling to quit.”

“We don’t know everything about these products, but we do know a lot. it is time Australia caught up with other similar countries like Canada and New Zealand and allowed smokers legal access to these lifesaving products” he said.

**ENDS**

## References

- (1) No Fire, No Smoke: The Global State of Tobacco Harm Reduction 2018 (2018). London: Knowledge-Action-Change. Available at <https://www.gsthr.org>

Knowledge-Action-Change is a UK-based private sector public health agency. The report was supported solely by a grant from the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World. The Foundation played no part in determining the content, analysis, or conclusions in the report and provided input only at the initial concept stage.

- (2) World Health Organisation. Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. 2005. Available at: [http://www.who.int/tobacco/framework/WHO\\_FCTC\\_english.pdf](http://www.who.int/tobacco/framework/WHO_FCTC_english.pdf)

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## 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 aims to raise awareness of less harmful alternatives for adult smokers who are otherwise unable to quit. ATHRA's broader goal is to encourage the complete cessation of tobacco smoking in Australia. For more information, visit [www.athra.org.au](http://www.athra.org.au)

ATHRA is funded by donations from businesses and the general public. It does not accept donations from tobacco companies or their subsidiaries.

None of the directors has ever had any financial or commercial relationship with any electronic cigarette or tobacco company.

### Australian Tobacco Harm Reduction Association

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