



SENATOR DAVID LEYONHJELM

Leader of the Liberal Democrats

MEDIA RELEASE

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More smokers will die on Hunt's watch

The crossbench has put the Turnbull Government on notice: No bills for which Health Minister Greg Hunt is responsible will pass through the Senate until he reverses the ban on nicotine e-cigarettes.

The report into e-cigarettes released today by the House of Representatives' Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport recommends the continuing ban on the sale of nicotine vaping products in Australia while more research is done.

Unusually, the chair of the committee, Trent Zimmerman, produced an accompanying dissenting report, as did another two of Minister Hunt's Liberal colleagues – Tim Wilson and Andrew Laming.

Liberal Democrats Senator David Leyonhjelm has warned Minister Hunt that unless he drops his unscientific and callous opposition to e-cigarettes, a critical number of crossbenchers in the Senate will block all future health bills.

"I've had assurances from crossbench colleagues that they will adhere to this strategy until the Health Minister reverses his ideological "not on my watch" opposition to e-cigarettes," Senator Leyonhjelm said.

"While evidence on the long-term effects of vaping is still emerging, it is irrefutable that e-cigarettes are less harmful than tobacco. The entire European Union and the United States have already recognised this in legislation.

"To continue to deny smokers another weapon in the arsenal against tobacco addiction is immoral and hypocritical. How can cigarettes remain legally available in Australia while less harmful nicotine products remain prohibited?"

Senator Leyonhjelm said the government's target of reducing smoking to 10 per cent of the population in 2018 will clearly fail, with smoking rates hovering just above 12 per cent since 2013. By contrast, smoking rates are falling in countries where e-cigarettes are legal.

"Knowing the consequences of people continuing to smoke, it is up to the Health Minister to examine his conscience and justify how he can continue the ban on a potentially life-saving product," Senator Leyonhjelm said.

"Otherwise he can expect to make no progress in the Senate in the future."