



3 October 2018

E-CIGARETTES A PUBLIC HEALTH RISK

The AMA (WA) is concerned with mounting pressure from vaping advocates and the tobacco industry to weaken Australian tobacco control measures by overturning restrictions on e-cigarettes.

It is crucial to recognise the importance of Australia's statutory health authorities and of rigorous, independent research in evaluating the evidence on novel products like e-cigarettes, which could pose a serious risk to public health.

The vast majority of Australian government and non-government health organisations have taken a joint precautionary position on electronic cigarettes.

Since 2011, the NHMRC has invested \$8.3 million in nine studies to investigate the risks and benefits of e-cigarettes. In 2017 it released its summary findings: there was insufficient evidence to conclude that electronic cigarettes assisted smokers to quit, but there was evidence that electronic cigarette use in non-smokers was associated with future take-up of smoking.

Following an extensive review in 2017, the TGA found no case for declassifying liquid nicotine as a poison to support its use in electronic cigarettes. In June this year, the CSIRO published a comprehensive, independent literature review which also supports the precautionary position. It found that evidence is consistent in suggesting electronic cigarette use by non-smoking youth predicts future smoking but was unable to determine whether electronic cigarette use would reduce population smoking rates overall.

In the context of well-established evidence of the harm caused by tobacco, and the resulting declines in smoking rates, it is not surprising that the tobacco industry would recognise the potential in products that either maintain or establish a nicotine addiction. The latest incarnation of heated tobacco products is reminiscent of past efforts to use similar products to undermine tobacco control, particularly efforts that present the tobacco industry as a partner in harm reduction.

The covert techniques of tobacco companies to influence public policy, such as lobbying and funding Australian political parties, often via third party organisations, must be exposed and regulated.

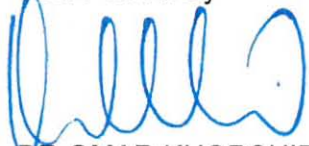
As well as harmful nicotine exposure from e-cigarettes directly, there is evidence of a gateway effect for young people to tobacco smoking. In September the head of the US Food and Drug Administration, Dr Scott Gottlieb, issued a public warning about an "epidemic" of youth e-cigarette use that threatens to create a new generation of nicotine addicts. It would be a tragedy if Australia faced a similar threat, given our great achievements in reducing youth tobacco use to an all-time low of below 2% in 12 to 17-year-olds.

Any ongoing reviews of e-cigarettes must be done through independent, rigorous processes, without risk of political interference. Australia's adherence to independence and rigour in the evaluation of health interventions is one of the reasons our smoking rates are low and our tobacco control is the envy of the rest of the world.

The AMA (WA) commends both the State and Federal Ministers for Health, the Hon. Roger Cook MLA and the Hon. Greg Hunt MP, for their support of statutory agencies in their portfolios on e-cigarettes and the need for precaution in light of current evidence.

Thank you for your contributions as political leaders to Australia's positive health outcomes.

Yours sincerely



DR OMAR KHORSHID
PRESIDENT