

Major parties facing internal push for vaping to be legalised

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Lifting a ban on electronic cigarettes would help thousands of Aussie smokers kick the habit, new research has found.

A damning report into the Government's ban on vaping by the McKell Institute claims Australia is "out of step" with other western nations and is at risk of missing out on a "huge public health opportunity" to reduce the harm caused by cigarettes.

In Australia, smoking is the leading cause of preventable death and illness but nearly three million Australians continue to smoke.

The latest report reveals smoking rates in the UK and US — where vaping is legal — are falling faster than in Australia for the first time.



E-cigarettes are currently illegal but there is a push to lift the ban to help smokers kick the habit.

Australia is one of just 30 countries where battery-powered cigarettes that vaporise flavoured nicotine are illegal.

The products can only be imported with a prescription for up to three months.

Weeks out from the election, both major parties remain opposed to vaping despite a growing number of MPs from both the Government and Labor pushing for the ban to be lifted.

Late last year, Health Minister Greg Hunt bowed to internal pressure from his party room and commissioned research on the potential health benefits of e-cigarettes which isn't expected until after the election.

If elected, Labor confirmed it would consider the findings of the report but doesn't believe there is enough evidence to support a policy change before the election.

The latest research found that while vaping is not "risk free", the long-term use is no more than 5 per cent as harmful as smoking.



The report claims Australia is at risk of missing out on a "huge public health opportunity" to reduce the harm caused by cigarettes. Picture: iStock

"Vaping provides another quitting strategy at no cost to the public purse," the report found. "Legalising vaping has enormous potential to improve public health, particularly for disadvantaged smokers who are disproportionately affected by smoking-related disease."

The research also debunked the theory that e-cigarettes act as a "gateway to youth smoking", finding no link between the products and an increase in smoking rates over the past 10 years.

President of the Australian Drug Law Reform Foundation Alex Wodak and Associate Professor Colin Mendelsohn, chairman of the Australian Tobacco Harm Reduction Association, who wrote the report, have called for e-cigarettes to be sold as a consumer product rather than a medical device.

"There is no case for excessive taxes on vaping products on public health grounds as this will lead to less vaping and increased smoking," the report said.