

MEDIA RELEASE

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McKell Media Release

New report recommends lifting Australia's ban on vaping to help smokers quit

Australia should lift its effective ban on vaping, because it would improve – and, in many cases, save – lives, according to a new report co-authored by Conjoint Associate Professor Colin Mendelsohn and Dr Alex Wodak AM.

Legalising Vaping in Australia finds “there is convincing scientific evidence that vaping helps some people quit smoking, including a recent, large randomised trial which found that vaping is nearly twice as effective as conventional nicotine replacement therapy.”

The report shows that in the UK and US, where vaping is legal, smoking rates are now falling faster than in Australia for the first time.

Professor Mendelsohn said the gap in legal availability between cigarettes and nicotine liquid, which is only about five per cent as harmful, is jarring and illogical.

“It’s illegal to possess nicotine liquid for vaping in Australia without a prescription from a doctor, but smokers can purchase high-risk cigarettes from the corner shop,” Professor Mendelsohn said.

“Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death and illness and Australian smokers know this. Two out of three want to quit and about 40 per cent try to stop smoking at least once each year. Vaping provides another quitting strategy at no cost to the public purse.

“Smokers who switch to vaping can expect substantial improvements in health as well as large financial savings. This is important because we know smoking is concentrated in disadvantaged populations. The daily smoking rate for adults in the most disadvantaged areas is three times higher than in the least disadvantaged areas.”

Professor Mendelsohn noted that while quitting cold turkey was always preferable, it was important for policymakers to be pragmatic.

“Complete cessation of all tobacco and nicotine consumption is always the ideal goal,” Professor Mendelsohn said.

“However, a large proportion of smokers are unable or unwilling to quit unaided or with conventional therapies and therefore remain at high risk. Tobacco harm reduction (THR) aims to reduce the health risks in continuing smokers.

“This involves switching from combustible tobacco to a lower-risk smokeless alternative that delivers the nicotine smokers are addicted to, but without the smoke. This is not ideal but is still far less harmful than smoking. Tobacco harm reduction is the missing ingredient in Australia’s tobacco control plan.

“Legalising vaping has enormous potential to improve public health.”

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