

4 March 2020

Lung Foundation Australia Board
Via email: helenb@lungfoundation.com.au

Board of directors
Dr Joe Kosterich
A/Prof Colin Mendelsohn
Dr Alex Wodak AM
Mr Ean Alexander

Dear Board Members,

This is an open letter about a recent opinion piece in The Mercury by CEO Mark Brooke: [Talking Point: Vaping can hook a new generation](#), on Saturday 29 February 2020.

We were particularly concerned about the following statement:

“there is strong, credible evidence that both nicotine and flavoured vaping products are just as harmful, if not more harmful, than conventional cigarettes”

There is no evidence to support this claim that we are aware of. Almost all the harm caused by smoking arises from the toxic chemicals from burning tobacco leaf. Because e-cigarettes do not involve combustion, these toxins are either not present or are present at much lower levels in e-cigarette vapour and when measured in the body (biomarkers of exposure).

The differences are not marginal but measured in orders of magnitude. For this reason, it is beyond any reasonable doubt that e-cigarettes are much less risky than cigarettes and the debate among legitimate experts is centred on how much less risky.

For example, reviews by respected health and medical organisations include:

[British Lung Foundation](#), 2019

"It remains clear that continuing to use an e-cigarette is significantly less harmful than continuing to smoke cigarettes"

[UK Royal College of Physicians](#), 2016

“the hazard to health arising from long-term vapour inhalation from the e-cigarettes available today is unlikely to exceed 5% of the harm from smoking tobacco.”

[Public Health England](#), 2018

“Vaping poses only a small fraction of the risks of smoking and switching completely from smoking to vaping conveys substantial health benefits over continued smoking. Based on current knowledge, stating that vaping is at least 95% less harmful than smoking remains a good way to communicate the large difference in relative risk unambiguously so that more smokers are encouraged to make the switch from smoking to vaping. It should be noted that this does not mean e-cigarettes are safe”

[US National Academies of Engineering, Sciences and Medicine](#), 2019

“Conclusion 18-1. There is conclusive evidence that completely substituting e-cigarettes for combustible tobacco cigarettes reduces users’ exposure to numerous toxicants and carcinogens present in combustible tobacco cigarettes.”

“Conclusion 18-2. There is substantial evidence that completely switching from regular use of combustible tobacco cigarettes to e-cigarettes results in reduced short-term adverse health outcomes in several organ systems.”

[Polosa R et al.](#) 2019

The effect of e-cigarette aerosol emissions on respiratory health: a narrative review. Expert Review of Respiratory Medicine. 2019

“Growing evidence supports the relative safety of EC emission aerosols for the respiratory tract compared to tobacco smoke”

[Stephens WE et al.](#), 2017

Comparing the cancer potencies of emissions from vapourised nicotine products including e-cigarettes with those of tobacco smoke. Tobacco Control 2017

The lifetime cancer risk from vaping is <1% of the cancer risk from smoking

When contacted by a vaper, Mr Brookes replied “you can find our references in the Foundation’s submission to the TGA which will be released in the near future”. This is puzzling as the TGA is currently considering an application for Heated Tobacco Products which are quite different to electronic cigarettes.

Could the Board please provide evidence to support this claim made by the chief executive if it exists. If this evidence is not available as we believe, could you please outline how you will correct this misinformation to the public.

Lung Foundation Australia is an important respected health charity. Misinformation on a serious health issue will undermine the LFA’s credibility and reduce public trust.

Even more importantly, this advice may cause vapers to return to smoking or may discourage smokers from switching to vaping, a far less harmful alternative. This would result in increased smoking-related deaths and illness.

Ultimately, the Board is responsible for ensuring the Foundation acts ethically, honestly and professionally and complies with charity law.

We look forward to your reply.

Yours truly


Colin Mendelsohn.

Conjoint Associate Professor Colin Mendelsohn

On behalf of the Board of the Australian Tobacco Harm Reduction Association