

OPINION

Talking Point: Vaping can hook a new generation

MARK BROOKE: Don't be fooled by the push to legalise e-cigarettes

Mercury

 Subscriber only | February 29, 2020 12:00am



 VAPING: Strong evidence of the harm of e-cigarettes.

Australia's health should not be influenced by the billion-dollar vaping industry.

Robert Mallet, who represents tobacco retailers, gets two things right in his opinion piece — nicotine vaping products are illegal in Australia and flavoured vaping products are significantly unregulated (“[Legalise vaping to help Tasmania cut shocking smoking rate](#),” Talking Point, February 28).

Mr Mallet does express concern for current smokers but what he's really about is sales and profits.

In Australia, tobacco retailers have been experiencing significant reduction in sales and profits as the smoking rates in Australia decline.

As cigarette consumption has declined, Big Tobacco has developed new products in order to offset losses, create new markets and gain new users.

These products, which look like iPhones and USBs, are targeted to appeal to young people. Once a person gets hooked on nicotine — especially a young person — big tobacco gets a captive, long-term high-paying customer. Without nicotine addiction there would be no tobacco industry.

Raising the minimum legal sales age of tobacco to 21 (the T21 campaign) — rightly under consideration in Tasmania — is an evidence-based measure to protect young people from acquiring a lifelong addiction to nicotine and avoidable disease, including lung cancer.

T21 laws have recently been adopted in the United States; to stem the epidemic of youth vaping in schools.

We and others in the health sector — including state, territory and federal health authorities; the experts who do not have a commercial interest in selling nicotine products, but have responsibility and experience in protecting the health of Australians — are clear: e-cigarettes or other novel products are not less harmful than conventional cigarettes, that is why they are illegal in Australia.

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

For example: the National Health and Medical Research Council advises that flavoured e-cigarettes may expose users to chemicals and toxins such as formaldehyde, heavy metals, particulate matter and flavouring chemicals, at levels — much higher than cigarettes — that have the potential to cause adverse health effects.

The e-cigarettes currently for sale in Australia have not passed through a rigorous testing process and have not been proven safe to use.

As to Mallet's stultifying claim about other nations who have legalised novel nicotine products, Australians are an independent people and we know that a business model which relies on addiction leading to disease and death is simply unAustralian.

Mark Brooke is chief executive of the Lung Foundation Australia.