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Good morning

Immediate Media Release

Latest Cochrane Review finds high certainty evidence that nicotine e-cigarettes are more effective than traditional nicotine-replacement therapy in helping people quit smoking.

Research led by the University of Oxford has found the strongest evidence yet that e-cigarettes, or vaping products, help people to quit smoking better than traditional nicotine replacement therapies (NRT), such as patches and chewing gums. [1]

The latest Cochrane Review published today concluded for the first-time that there is “high certainty” evidence that people are more likely to stop smoking for at least six months using nicotine e-cigarettes, than using nicotine replacement therapies, such as patches and gums. Cochrane reviews are widely regarded as the most authoritative summaries of the state of evidence. The updated review includes 78 studies in over 22,000 participants.

Data from the review showed that, compared with quitting without any form of nicotine, six in 100 extra people will quit by using nicotine replacement therapy, but eight to twelve extra would quit by using electronic cigarettes containing nicotine. This means an additional two to six people in 100 could potentially quit smoking with nicotine containing electronic cigarettes.

Founding Chairman of the Australian Tobacco Harm Reduction Association, Dr Colin Mendelsohn said smoking is highly addictive and many smokers simply can't quit with conventional treatments. “The Australian Government and health organisations have discouraged vaping because of insufficient proof it is an effective quitting aid. This review confirms that there is now strong scientific evidence that vaping nicotine is an effective quitting method, which could help hundreds of thousands of Australian smokers quit”.

Leading tobacco researcher and Professor from the School of Psychological Sciences at Melbourne University, Ron Borland said “We now have high level research from randomised controlled trials that vaping nicotine is an effective quitting aid, indeed better than aids that are currently being subsidised and encouraged. This evidence is also supported by other types of research, such as observational studies, population studies and the experiences in countries where vaping is readily available and smoking rates are declining at increasing rates. Australian authorities need to make them more available and educate smokers about the benefits.”

Vaping nicotine can be used as a short-term quitting aid or as a long-term substitute for smoking to prevent relapse. Vaping devices heat a liquid nicotine solution into an aerosol and mimic smoking behaviour. They do not burn tobacco and release only a tiny fraction of the toxicants in smoke, most at very low doses.

The review found reported side-effects of vaping were rare and similar to NRT in the short-to-medium term (up to two years). Reported side-effects of both included mouth or throat irritation, headache, cough, and feeling nauseous. However, these effects appeared to diminish over time.

A comprehensive review commissioned by the government of England last month found that “vaping poses only a small fraction of the risks of smoking” and is likely to be around 95% less harmful. [2]

Emeritus Professor Wayne Hall from the National Centre for Youth Substance Use Research at the University of Queensland said “Vaping is not risk-free, but it is far less harmful than smoking. People who don’t smoke and young people should not vape, but adult smokers will have enormous health benefits if they use vaping to quit or switch completely to vaping. Vaping is a proven and effective quitting aid which should be widely available to Australian smokers”.

While the long-term effects of vaping are still unknown, the harmful effects of smoking are indisputable – **approximately 21,000 Australians die prematurely every year from smoking.** [3]

“The current Australian prescription-only regulations for vaping nicotine are not working. [4] It is easy to purchase deadly cigarettes but very difficult to legally buy nicotine vapes which are a highly effective quitting aid. We need sensible regulation in Australia which allows adult smokers access to legal, regulated vaping products while restricting access for young people”, Dr Mendelsohn said.

This research was led by the University of Oxford, and funded by Cancer Research UK [A ref. A29845]

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Notes to Editors

[1] Electronic cigarettes for smoking cessation. Cochrane Tobacco Addiction Group. 17 November 2022

<https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD010216.pub7/full>

[2] McNeill A et al. Nicotine vaping in England: an evidence update including health risks and perceptions, 2022. A report commissioned by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. Kings College London. 29 September 2022

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nicotine-vaping-in-england-2022-evidence-update>

[3] Banks E. Tobacco smoking and all-cause mortality in a large Australian cohort study. BMC Medicine 2015

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25857449/>

[4] TGA admits that Australia’s vaping regulations are not working. Blog Colin Mendelsohn 15 November 2022

<https://colinmendelsohn.com.au/tga/>

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Declarations of competing interest

Colin Mendelsohn was an unpaid Board member of the [Australian Tobacco Harm Reduction Association](#) (ATHRA) from October 2017 until January 2020. ATHRA is a registered health promotion charity dedicated to raising awareness of low-risk nicotine products as a substitute for smokers who can't quit. ATHRA received support initially from two vape companies to help set up the charity. This was publicly declared and non-conditional. Funding ceased in March 2019. ATHRA has since been funded only by personal donations.

He is the author of a book, [Stop Smoking Start Vaping](#). He has never received funding from e-cigarette or tobacco companies.

Professors Hall and Borland have no interests to declare