

Why the NHMRC CEO Statement on Electronic Cigarettes is flawed

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is Australia's peak government health and medical research organisation that guides health policy in Australia. In 2022, it published a position statement on electronic cigarettes. [\[link\]](#)

A review of this Statement by 11 leading Australian and international addiction experts found that the document was scientifically flawed, contained misinformation and was biased. The critique was published in the scientific journal *Addiction* on 21 February 2023. [\[link\]](#)

ISSUE	FACT
1. Safety	The NHMRC exaggerates the risk of vaping and fails to compare it to the alternative, tobacco smoking. It incorrectly claims that vaping nicotine cause seizures and the serious lung conditions 'EVALI and 'popcorn lung'.
2. Effectiveness	It claims that there is weak evidence that vaping is an effective quitting aid. However, the 2022 Cochrane review concluded that "there is high-certainty evidence that e-cigarettes are more effective than nicotine replacement therapy". It dismisses the findings of other studies (observational, population, national smoking rates) which provide further support that vaping is effective.
3. Youth uptake	It falsely claims that vaping is a 'gateway' to smoking for young people. In fact, the opposite is more likely to be true. Smoking rates are declining faster in young people as youth vaping rates increase. Vaping is diverting more young people AWAY from smoking overall than encouraging them to smoke.
4. Public health impact	The NHMRC dismisses evidence that vaping is having a positive public health impact. However, numerous population and modelling studies have found that smoking rates are falling faster than ever since vaping became popular and overall, the benefits strongly outweigh the costs.
5. The precautionary principle	The NHMRC argues that we should not allow vaping because of uncertain long-term risks. However, the relatively small risks from vaping will be far outweighed by the more substantial known harms from delaying access to smokers.

Conflicts of interest and bias

Conflicts of interest and bias by the NHMRC are also a serious concern. Three members of the Working Committee have published papers opposing vaping. Other members of the Committee represent organisations with strong public anti-vaping positions. No experts who take a positive view on the potential of vaping or even smoker or vaper representatives were included.

Conclusion

The NHMRC document fails to meet the high standards expected of a leading health and medical organisation and is not suitable to guide Australian policy on vaping. The NHMRC statement should be withdrawn. An impartial review of the evidence by a balanced committee led by an independent scientist with no predetermined position is urgently required.

Mendelsohn CP, Hall W, Borland R, Wodak A, Beaglehole R, Benowitz NL, Britton J, Bullen C, Etter J-F, McNeill A and Rigotti NA. A critique of the Australian NHMRC CEO Statement on electronic cigarettes *Addiction*. 2023
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