

Media release

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Australia Must Follow New Zealand and Sweden to Reduce Smoking – New Report

New Zealand and Sweden have experienced unprecedented declines in smoking by enabling smokers to switch to risk-reduced alternatives such as vaping and snus, and are on the verge of becoming ‘smoke-free’*. A similar approach in Australia could save thousands of lives, according to a new report titled *SmokeFree New Zealand*, prepared by a team of international experts and launched today in Poland. (attached)

Lead author of the report, Professor Marewa Glover from New Zealand noted that smoking rates in New Zealand had been declining slowly for some years but saw a significant acceleration with the introduction of vaping.

“After New Zealand legalised and regulated vaping in 2020, we witnessed a remarkable 43% decline in daily adult smoking from 11.9% in 2020 to 6.8% in 2023. As a result, New Zealand is now on target to achieve its goal of becoming ‘smoke-free’ by 2025,” said Professor Glover.

“This change was supported by government initiatives, such as the [Vape to Quit Strong](#) campaign, an education website called [Vaping Facts](#), a mass media education campaign, and clear advice to public health practitioners,” she added.

Targeted, culturally appropriate campaigns were also directed at Māori smokers, resulting in an unprecedented 42% decline in smoking over 3 years from 28.6% in 2020 to 17.1% in 2023.

Sweden has had similar success. The smoking rate in Sweden plummeted by an impressive 55% over the last decade to 5.6% as a result of the widespread uptake of snus (a smokeless oral tobacco product), the introduction of vaping in 2015 and nicotine pouches in 2018. Sweden is set to become the first developed nation to achieve official ‘smoke-free’ status later this year.

Dr Colin Mendelsohn, a co-author of the report, stated, “This report sends a clear message to Australian policymakers. Vaping could accelerate the decline in deadly smoking and save thousands of Australian lives. The decrease in smoking has slowed markedly in recent years compared to many other developed countries and Australia is set to miss its ‘smoke-free’ target of 5% by 2030 by a wide margin.” (Figure 1)

“Vaping also presents a significant opportunity for Australia’s First Nations people,” Dr Mendelsohn said. “Currently [40% of First Nations adults](#) smoke and the rate has been declining slowly for many years, despite well-funded campaigns.”

In Australia, access to vaping products is highly restricted. According to Dr Mendelsohn, “The prescription model has been rejected by over ninety percent of adults who vape. This has led to the creation of a thriving black market controlled by criminal networks and a violent turf war with firebombing of tobacco and vape shops and homicides. In contrast, there is no significant black market for vapes in New Zealand.”

“The black market has made it easier for Australian youth to access vapes, and as a result they have one of the highest youth vaping rates in the world. (Figure 2) They are also exposed to high-nicotine and unregulated products.”

“Vape should be sold as adult consumer products from licensed retail outlets with strict age verification like tobacco and alcohol, as they are in New Zealand. This would give adult smokers easier access to help them quit, reduce access for young people, generate tax revenue and reduce the black market. This should be introduced in Australia as a matter of urgency,” Dr Mendelsohn emphasised.

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* Smoke-free is defined as less than 5% of adults smoking daily

SmokeFree New Zealand. Quitting Strong: New Zealand's Smoking Success Story 2024. Launched 13 June 2024 (attached)

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Note: both are attending a conference in Warsaw but are available by email or phone. Please leave a message if unable to contact us and we will call you back.

FURTHER INFORMATION

(see next page)

Figure 1. Adult daily smoking, NZ, AU, Sweden

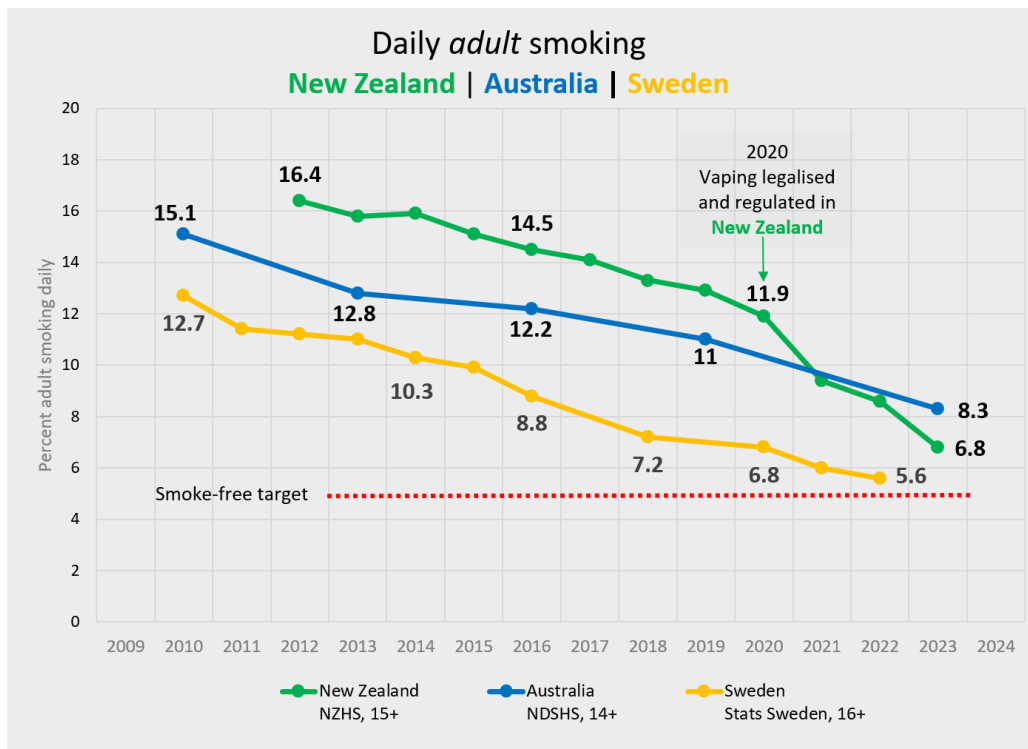
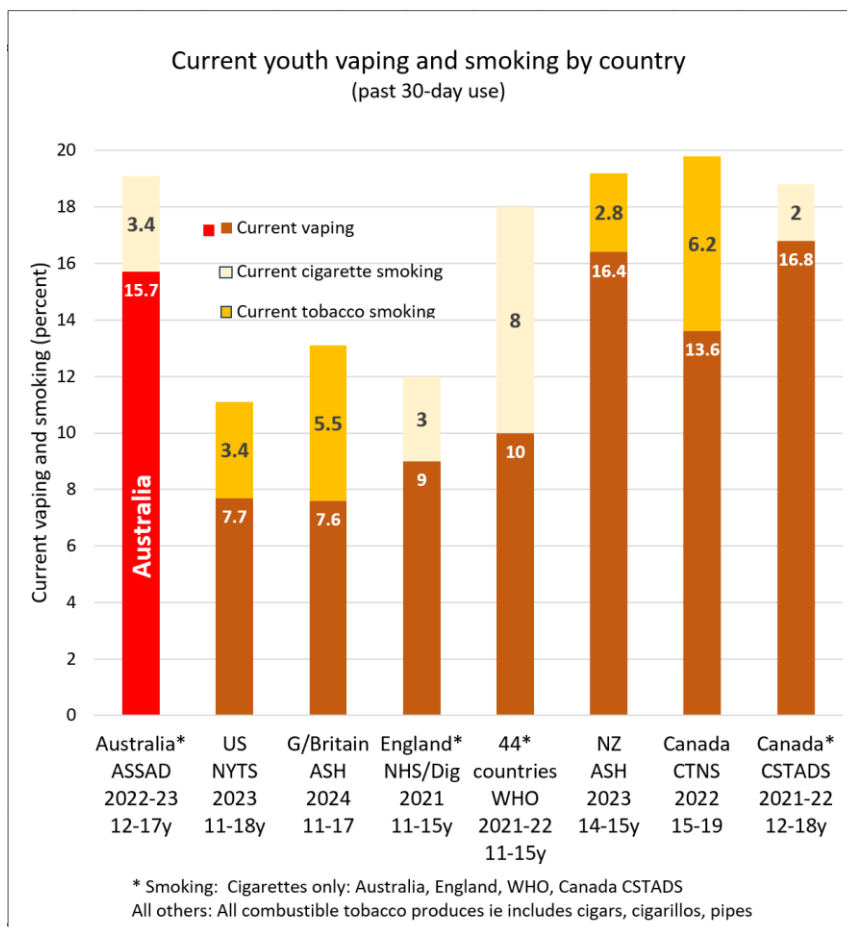


Figure 2. Youth vaping rates



Professor Marewa Glover

Professor Marewa Glover is one of New Zealand's leading tobacco control researchers. She has worked on reducing smoking-related harm for 31 years. She is recognised internationally for her advocacy on tobacco harm reduction; and locally was a Finalist in the New Zealander of the Year Supreme Award in 2019 recognising her contribution to reducing smoking in NZ. In 2018, Prof. Glover was appointed Tobacco Section Editor for the Harm Reduction Journal. In that year she also established the Centre of Research Excellence: Indigenous Sovereignty & Smoking, an international programme of research aimed at reducing smoking-related harms among Indigenous peoples globally. The Centre's research was funded with a grant from Global Action to End Smoking (formerly known as Foundation for Smoke-Free World), an independent, U.S. nonprofit 501(c)(3) grant-making organisation, accelerating science-based efforts worldwide to end the smoking epidemic. Professor Glover contributed to this report independently.

Dr Colin Mendelsohn

Dr Colin Mendelsohn has worked as a clinician and academic in smoking cessation and harm reduction for 40 years. He is the Founding Chairman of the Australian Tobacco Harm Reduction Association, a health promotion charity established to raise awareness of tobacco harm reduction options. He was a Conjoint Associate Professor in the School of Public Health and Community Medicine at the University of New South Wales. He was a member of the expert advisory group that develops the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners' national smoking cessation guidelines. He is the author of the book, Stop Smoking Start Vaping. He has no financial or commercial relationship with any electronic cigarette or tobacco company. He received no payment for his contribution to this report.

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