

MISSION STATEMENT OF THE TOBACCO HARM REDUCTION EXPERT GROUP

As experts in the science, economics and policy of tobacco harm reduction, we have come together here in Delhi to provide balanced and evidence-based information on harm reduction to delegates to the Seventh Conference of the Parties of the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Policies that increase access to less harmful substitutes to cigarettes, such as vape products, will provide an additional tool for smokers in their efforts to quit the deadly habit, supplementing and possibly strengthening many other tobacco control measures.

Long-term inhalation of smoke from burnt tobacco causes a wide range of non-communicable diseases, including lung cancer, chronic obstructive lung disease, peripheral arterial disease, and heart disease. One in two life-long smokers will die prematurely from a smoking related disease. In spite of its dangers, which are now widely known even among smokers, hundreds of millions of people continue to smoke, and more start every day. If current smoking patterns and trends continue, a billion people might die from smoking-related diseases in the 21st century.

Despite the availability of smoking cessation medications, many smokers do not want to try them. Of those who use them, the majority either fail or relapse within a year. To accelerate the reduction in smoking prevalence, public health experts have recommended that smokers be encouraged and assisted to switch completely to less harmful substitutes. WHO's FCTC also identifies harm reduction strategies as a core principle of tobacco control and has recently stated that:

“If the great majority of tobacco smokers who are unable or unwilling to quit would switch without delay to using an alternative source of nicotine with lower health risks, and eventually stop using it, this would represent a significant contemporary public health benefit.”

New technologies have recently emerged that comply with this principle. One such is the “electronic cigarette” (which the WHO refers to as Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems – ENDS), which deliver nicotine without burning tobacco. Relative to cigarette smoke, the vapor from e-cigarettes and personal vaporizers (the name given to larger, more powerful devices) contains very low levels of potentially harmful chemicals. Even nicotine itself is largely benign – contrary to widespread misconceptions – and is already approved for long-term use through nicotine replacement therapies. As Public Health England recently concluded, vaping is at least 95 per cent safer than smoking and acknowledged that e-cigarettes can be an effective aid to quitting smoking.

In the past five years, use of these products has increased dramatically in many countries. In the European Union alone, the use of such products has helped more than 6 million people to quit smoking and 9 million more have reduced smoking. Smoking prevalence is declining in all countries where e-cigarettes are readily available.

Based upon this evidence, we support government policies that seek to remove barriers to the availability of better, safer, non-combustible nicotine delivery products, with appropriate quality standards and regulations. Disproportionate restrictions, such as regulation of e-cigarettes as medical products, applying similar restrictions as for tobacco cigarettes, or bans on advertising, will only make such products extremely expensive, limit access of smokers to proper information, and create misconceptions that they are as harmful as smoking. These measures are counter-productive, ignore the risk continuum principle and unintentionally form a protective environment for tobacco cigarette sales.

The WHO has an opportunity now to improve radically the life expectancy of today's smokers by applying the principle of harm reduction that is already one of the core principles of WHO's tobacco control strategy.

Biographies of Members of the Tobacco Harm Reduction Expert Group

Konstantinos E. Farsalinos M.D. is a research fellow at the Onassis Cardiac Surgery Center in Athens, Greece, and at the Department of Pharmacy, University of Patras, Greece. He has been conducting laboratory and clinical research on vape products as principle investigator since 2011. He undertook the first study on the cytotoxic effects of “e-cigarette” vapor on cultured cells and the immediate effects of vaping on cardiac function and coronary circulation. He ran a worldwide online survey of almost 20,000 vapers, identifying patterns of use and experience with vape products among consumers. Dr Farsalinos has presented his research findings at major international scientific congresses and his research was used in preparing the regulatory framework on vape products by the European Union. As of 2016, he has published more than 40 studies and articles in international peer-reviewed scientific journals about smoking, tobacco harm reduction, and vape products.

Professor Riccardo Polosa is Director of the Institute for Internal and Emergency Medicine of the University of Catania in Italy. He is also in charge of the University’s Centre for Tobacco Research (CPCT), and Honorary Professor of Medicine at Southampton University (UK). He is author of more than 250 peer reviewed articles and books mainly covering respiratory medicine, clinical immunology, and tobacco addiction. Professor Polosa and his research team have lead several clinical trials on vape products.

Christopher Russell Ph.D. is a behavioural psychologist and senior research fellow at the Centre for Substance Use Research, Glasgow, Scotland. Dr Russell leads the Centre’s tobacco harm reduction research studies, with a particular focus on how vapers and e-cigarettes are helping smokers to quit. Dr Russell collects and collates the stories and experiences of thousands of vapers in order to identify antecedents of successful and unsuccessful attempts to switch from smoking to vaping. The results of this work are used to guide public health professionals and e-cigarette manufacturers as to how smokers can be better encouraged, supported, and informed to vape as an aid to quitting or reducing smoking, and to advise regulatory authorities against legislation that may reduce the accessibility, affordability and appeal of vape products as a way of quitting smoking.

Amir Ullah Khan Ph.D. is an economist who has worked on development issues primarily in the Health, education and agriculture sectors. He is senior policy advisor to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and a member in the Telangana Government’s Commission of Inquiry on Socio economic conditions headed by G Sudhir. He co-edits Sage’s Journal of Development Policy and Practice and teaches at the Indian School of Business in Hyderabad, the Manipal Institute of Technology, and the Indian Institute of Foreign Trade in Delhi. Dr Khan is the co-author, with Julian Morris, of *The Vapour Revolution: How Bottom Up Innovation is Saving Lives*.

Julian Morris is Vice President of Research at Reason Foundation. He is the author of over 50 scholarly articles and the editor of several books on the economics and law of innovation, regulation, health, and development. In addition to his role at Reason, Mr Morris edits the Electronic Journal of Sustainable Development, is a Senior Fellow of the International Center of Law and Economics, and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. He is the author, most recently, of *The World Health Organization’s Opposition to Tobacco Harm Reduction: A Threat to Public Health? And co-author, with Dr Amir Ullah Khan, of The Vapour Revolution: How Bottom Up Innovation is Saving Lives*.

Prof. Rajesh N. Sharan is an accomplished biochemist and molecular biologist working in the fields of cancer and radiation molecular biology with special interest in molecular mechanisms of carcinogenesis and radiation induced DNA damage for last over 3 decades at Department of Biochemistry, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong. He has over 100 research publications in international and national journals and books of repute to his credit and is serving as an Associate (Processing) Editor of the Journal of Radiation Research (Japan). He has recently co-authored a study on “Electronic Nicotine Delivery System (ENDS) as a substitute to conventional cigarette: an evidence-based audit”.