

# ALTERNATIVE RESEARCH INITIATIVE NEWSLETTER

February 2023

## Inside

### Page 2

UM study: E-cigarettes should be recommended more for smoking cessation  
Evidence is in on vapes as smoking cessation

### Page 3

Activists say still room to increase taxes on tobacco products  
What we can learn from Japan's move to cigarette alternatives

### Page 4

The tobacco harm reduction approach  
No smoking boards in Islamabad

## THR can help Pakistan end combustible smoking: Dr. Latif

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan needs to embrace tobacco harm reduction as a critical pathway for reducing the prevalence of combustible smoking and embark on the journey of a smoke-free future.

"Tobacco harm reduction allows adult smokers a choice of completely quitting or turning to safer alternatives," said Dr. Ehsan Latif, Senior Vice President, Grants Management and Health and Science Strategy, Foundation for a Smoke-Free World (FSFW).

He was speaking at a lecture on Thursday on "Why Pakistan should embrace Tobacco Harm Reduction to end combustible smoking", which was organized by Alternative Research Initiative. The lecture was attended by the civil society representatives, academicians, researchers, social scientists, and health professionals.

Dr. Latif has more than 20 years of experience managing the development and implementation of cohesive strategies to achieve public health gains by linking global health priorities to the needs on the ground. He represented the civil society from the EMRO region in all FCTC negotiations and implementation meetings. Previously, he served as senior adviser for non-communicable diseases and director of tobacco control at the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease, managing global teams.

Recalling Pakistan's tobacco control plans, policies, initiatives and efforts over the last two decades, Dr. Latif maintained the country made significant gains and changed the culture of acceptance for smoking. "Pakistan has achieved a lot on this front since ratifying the FCTC two decades back."

However, he added the prevalence of combustible smoking remains a major health issue in Pakistan. He said according to some estimates the number of tobacco users has reached 29 million from 23.9 million in 2014. Dr. Latif added that the developed world is planning for a smoke-free future. In this endeavor, he maintained that there is a need for ensuring that the adult smokers who are unable to quit smoking have access to the safer tobacco alternatives. "While trying to save



Dr. Ehsan Latif expressing his views in Islamabad on "Why Pakistan should embrace Tobacco Harm Reduction to end combustible smoking"

the youth from picking up the habit of smoking, we should not forget the adult smoker who is trying to quit this habit."

He said the calls for banning the THR products may result in more harm than good. "We have seen that banning a product never works. It only pushes into an illegal market, which is bad both for the overall health of people of this country but also economy which suffers even more."

Dr. Latif opined that the tobacco control policies should be evidence-based. He said Pakistan should review the THR products, and adopt them as tools to support adult smokers to either quit or switch. "THR products should be sensibly regulated. The legislation and regulation of THR products should be risk-appropriate".

Dr. Latif backed the government's tobacco control initiatives, but argued for reviewing the THR products as part of the solution for a smoke-free future. "Twenty years ago, Pakistan started addressing the endemic of tobacco use.

Today, we can move towards to a future without smoke. For this, there is a need for carefully looking at what science is offering in terms of helping the adult smokers." At the same time, Dr. Latif said every effort should be made to keep the youth away from every kind of tobacco related product.

## UM study: E-cigarettes should be recommended more for smoking cessation

Electronic cigarettes should be recommended more widely for helping some adults stop smoking tobacco, according to a new University of Michigan study.

In a study published last week in *Nature Medicine*, UM researchers said the e-cigarettes, or vapes, should be recommended more as smoking cessation aids because there is "abundant evidence" they can help some individuals quit smoking. *Nature Medicine* is a monthly peer-reviewed medical journal.

"Far too many adults who want to quit smoking are unable to do so," Kenneth Warner, dean emeritus, the Avedis Donabedian Distinguished University Professor Emeritus at the UM School of Public Health and one of the study's authors, said in a statement Monday. "E-cigarettes constitute the first new tool to help them in decades. Yet relatively few smokers and indeed health care professionals appreciate their potential value."

Researchers looked at vaping in countries that promote it as a smoking cessation measure and countries that do not. They said they evaluated the countries' regulatory activities, examined evidence that vaping increases smoking cessation, looked at the health consequences of e-cigarettes, and researched the implications for clinical care.

They said there is high-level support and promotion of e-cigarettes as a first-line smoking cessation treatment option in the United Kingdom and New Zealand. But in the United States and Canada, agencies acknowledge the potential benefit of e-cigarette use but deem the evidence to recommend the devices for smoking cessation as insufficient, the study's authors said.

The study also notes the FDA designates some e-cigarette brands as "appropriate for the protection of the public health," which is the standard it requires manufacturers to meet in order to receive government approval for marketing. "We believe that governments, medical professional groups, and individual health care professionals in countries such as the U.S., Canada, and Australia should give greater consideration to the potential of e-cigarettes for increasing smoking cessation," Warner said. "E-cigarettes are not the magic bullet that will end the devastation wrought by cigarette smoking, but they can contribute to that lofty public health goal."

<https://www.detroitnews.com/story/life/wellness/2023/02/20/um-study-e-cigarettes-should-be-recommended-more-for-smoking-cessation/69923850007/?fbclid=IwAR005NntFeqBPK-WrxPt74J2-IPX9D0LQfAgel-ErnpIKujo1Od-bocCqBo>

## Evidence is in on vapes as smoking cessation

By Helen Redmond

In a comment published in *Nature Medicine*, four leading researchers marshal the evidence that vapes can be used as a smoking cessation tool. Professors Neal Benowitz, Ann McNeill, Nancy Rigotti and Kenneth Warner begin by citing the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews that concluded: "There were high rates of certainty that [smoking] quit rates were higher in people randomized to nicotine [electronic cigarettes] than those randomized to nicotine replacement therapy."

This makes sense because vaping devices deliver nicotine much faster than patches or gums, and mimic the pleasurable rituals of smoking. Now, according to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, people who smoke are more likely to use vapes in quit attempts than any other products, including smoking cessation medications. And this is happening even as misinformation and junk science about vaping abound—as well as frenzied attacks by organizations like the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, Truth Initiative and Parents Against Vaping E-Cigarettes.

The comment contains an important section that details high-level, governmental support for vaping in the United Kingdom and New Zealand. Both countries are light-years ahead of the US in advocating the use of vapes and focusing on vulnerable populations with the highest smoking rates, like unhoused people, people with mental health diagnoses and Indigenous populations. In government-funded stop smoking campaigns, both countries enthusiastically recommend vaping and advise health care providers to counsel patients to try it. Some mental health hospitals in both the UK and New Zealand have vape shops located inside, to make the transition from smoking to vaping easy and convenient.

Most health care providers in the US, on the other hand, are vehemently opposed to tobacco harm reduction (THR). They

wrongly believe, despite the FDA authorizing several vapes as "appropriate for the protection of public health," that there is insufficient evidence that vaping helps people quit smoking. Many don't accept that vaping is vastly safer than smoking cigarettes, either. The comment includes a table that contains guidance for health care professionals to help people quit smoking with vapes—a valuable resource when research has shown, incredibly, that 80 percent of US physicians believe nicotine directly causes cancer.

The comment would have been much stronger if the four authors had included a call to action emphasizing the deadly consequences of not endorsing the evidence-based intervention of vaping. Instead, they ask for "greater consideration to the potential of e-cigarettes for increasing smoking cessation." That tone is too cautious and lacks the required urgency.

Almost half a million people die from smoking-related diseases every year in the US. It is the epidemic that no one talks about anymore. The evidence is in, and health care providers have a critical role to play in helping patients quit. It should be considered malpractice if they don't recommend vaping.

The comment should also have driven home the point that access to safer nicotine products is about the right to health. The authors write, "E-cigarettes are not the magic bullet that will end the devastation wrought by cigarette smoking but they can contribute to that lofty public health goal." Vaping devices are the closest thing we have to a magic bullet. Our urgent task is to get them into the hands of people who smoke.

[https://filtermag.org/evidence-vapes-smoking-cessation-urgency/?fbclid=IwAR38obnGQx-8HG-oqVQMkIDNxP2baUVyGeR\\_vrVlvc4I04tNpFZGDmNkSQ](https://filtermag.org/evidence-vapes-smoking-cessation-urgency/?fbclid=IwAR38obnGQx-8HG-oqVQMkIDNxP2baUVyGeR_vrVlvc4I04tNpFZGDmNkSQ)

## Activists say still room to increase taxes on tobacco products

ISLAMABAD: While commending the statutory regulatory order (SRO) aimed to increase taxes on cigarettes, health activists have said there was more room to generate revenue. In a statement, Coalition for Tobacco Control Pakistan (CTC-Pak) stated: "Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has taken a historic step to protect public health. The move will further strengthen sustainable economic growth. But there is room available to increase further taxes on cigarettes, helping a great deal in reducing the affordability of cigarettes, especially among youth."

"The demand for tobacco is strongly influenced by its price. Taxation is the most cost-effective way of reducing tobacco consumption, especially among young people and those on low incomes. Price increases encourage people to stop smoking, prevent others from starting smoking, and discourage ex-smokers from starting smoking again."

"Studies have shown that the effect of taxation is more pronounced in developing countries. A price rise of 10pc decreases consumption by 4pc in developed countries and by up to 8pc in developing countries. There is considerable scope to increase tobacco prices through taxation. In many countries, cigarette prices have not kept up with increases in the price of other goods and services. Studies have also predicted that cigarette price increases of 33pc would prevent 22-65 million smoking-related deaths worldwide or 5-15pc of all such deaths," it stated.

In another press release shared by Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (Sparc), Malik Imran Ahmed, country head, Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, mentioned that the government has repeatedly said that it has to take harsh decisions in order to fill the state's coffers and meet the IMF's requirement. However, there is one area where increasing taxation is logical and beneficial and that is the tobacco sector.

He mentioned that tobacco-induced diseases caused an

annual economic burden of Rs615 billion which was 1.6pc of Pakistan's gross domestic product (GDP).

"On the other hand, the revenue generated from the tobacco industry is Rs120 billion. When a product is causing this much health loss, a levy must be implemented on it. Pakistan moved in this direction in 2019 by tabling a tobacco health levy bill but it has not seen the light of the day due to continuous interference of the tobacco industry," he said. Khalil Ahmed Dogar, programme manager (Sparc) stated that the challenging financial situation requires sustainable measures.

"Pakistan is seeking foreign aid to rescue its citizens from financial disaster. Therefore, the government should take those decisions which can benefit the health and wealth of the public. One-time measures will bring us back to square one and we will have to ask for foreign aid again," he said. Similarly, Alternative Research Initiative (ARI) has also welcomed the increase in federal excise duty (FED) on cigarettes.

"It is a step in the right direction. Higher prices of cigarettes influence smokers' purchase patterns and lead to decreased cigarette consumption. However, at the same time there is a need for ensuring other critical measures to ensure that the consumption of cigarettes is reduced," according to a statement.

"There is also a need for enhancing the availability of smoking cessation services across Pakistan. This is critical for adult smokers who have been unable to quit smoking. Tobacco harm reduction products can complement the policy measures like increase in taxes on cigarettes and help Pakistan decrease smoking prevalence," ARI Project Director Arshad Ali Syed said.

[https://www.dawn.com/news/1737321/activists-say-still-room-to-increase-taxes-on-tobacco-products?fbclid=IwAR2B8CXC3m4L7-t\\_hRBS6AGxt61VeFQJD69g7WL3bK9aW9jfAXb-uls30CM](https://www.dawn.com/news/1737321/activists-say-still-room-to-increase-taxes-on-tobacco-products?fbclid=IwAR2B8CXC3m4L7-t_hRBS6AGxt61VeFQJD69g7WL3bK9aW9jfAXb-uls30CM)

## What we can learn from Japan's move to cigarette alternatives

By Syed Hajib Hassan

Recent studies have revealed that cigarette sales in Japan went down significantly and rapidly as soon as less harmful alternatives, such as E-Cigarettes and heated tobacco products were introduced to the market.

Being one of the largest tobacco markets, Japan is a technologically advanced nation with a sophisticated consumer base. They were quick to discover and adopt these alternatives, leading to a significant shift in the market share of cigarettes country-wide.

Research has identified hundreds of harmful chemicals within the smoke of burning tobacco in cigarettes. Heated tobacco products, on the other hand, create a fundamentally different composition of less harmful emissions, based on droplets formed by condensation.

Since the introduction of these alternatives, cigarette sales have plummeted at a rate that is five times faster than the previous years in Japan. This enormous shift has taken place organically, even before the introduction of any tobacco

control policies by the Japanese government.

During the time that heated tobacco products were gaining immense popularity in Japan, the American Cancer Society's research observed an accelerated decline in cigarette sales. The same conclusion was drawn by other independent researchers who had been studying the country's cigarette consumption patterns since 2016.

Following in Japan's footsteps, Pakistan can also gradually begin the move towards cigarette alternatives to lessen the impact on those adults who choose to continue smoking. Thanks to scientific innovation in the heated tobacco product industry, smoking can be reduced significantly across the country, contributing to a future with fewer hospitalizations from smoking-related diseases.

<https://propakistani.pk/2023/03/01/what-we-can-learn-from-japans-move-to-cigarette-alternatives/?fbclid=IwAR2zMHOS1-e7n6NBriOsS7eCSSG0-UFvLg6tVudvUWmjagvHDQd1LhGv4jw>

# The tobacco harm reduction approach

When it comes to tobacco harm reduction (THR), the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (Article 1) (FCTC) explicitly endorses harm reduction strategies in tobacco control[8]: (d) “Tobacco control” means a range of supply, demand and harm reduction strategies that aim to improve the health of a population by eliminating or reducing their consumption of tobacco products and exposure to tobacco smoke”. This means reducing harm to people who continue to use nicotine or tobacco. Despite this endorsement in the FCTC text, this tobacco harm reduction approach has not yet been expanded in the Convention. It has also not been widely developed as a tobacco control strategy other than by chance.

A crucial insight into tobacco and health strategy is to recognise the ultimate cause of harm. Nicotine is the active drug in tobacco, and the reason why people smoke tobacco. However, it once again needs to be emphasised that nicotine is not the primary cause of harm arising from smoking. As mentioned before, it has been understood for forty years that.

Nicotine is not a cause of cancer, cardiovascular disease or the respiratory conditions that dominate the ill health from smoking. While pure nicotine is not completely benign, it is widely sold in medicinal form and does not cause any serious illness.

Many decades of experience with Swedish snus (a form of smokeless tobacco), suggests that tobacco and nicotine use can carry a very low risk when there is no combustion. The US Surgeon General has made a detailed assessment of nicotine risks and though it is possible to measure many effects on the body, these are trivial compared to the harms

clearly associated with smoking.

Harm reduction can make a significant contribution to tobacco control. People who smoke regularly visit their health professionals, simply because they are more prone to disease. A significant number of those who smoke can be classified as “inveterate” smokers i.e. those with a long established habit of smoking who are unable or unwilling to quit. Tobacco harm reduction (THR) recognises this problem and offers these smokers a pragmatic alternative. In essence, therefore, the goal with THR is to minimise harm and decrease total morbidity and mortality, without completely eliminating tobacco and/or nicotine use.

In practice, THR refers to substituting the highest risk tobacco products – combustible cigarettes –, with lower-risk nicotine and tobacco products. The latter includes nicotine replacement therapy pharmaceuticals, low-nitrosamine smokeless tobacco products and e-cigarettes (or vaping products). The substitution is entirely aligned with the principles of harm reduction:

- The objective is to reduce harm to health for smokers unable or unwilling to stop;
- The primary intent is not to stop nicotine use altogether, but to prevent harm to the user and those around them; and
- In no way is it intended to minimise or replace evidence-based approaches to prevent smoking initiation, quitting programs and the protection of non-smokers to second hand smoke.

From Saving Lives – An Advocate’s Guide to Tobacco Harm Reduction

## No smoking boards in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD - Dr Akbar Niazi Teaching Hospital and Islamabad Medical & Dental College in collaboration with ICT Administration, Health Ministry’s Tobacco Control Cell, and Islamabad Traffic Authority (ITA) installed no smoking boards at different bus/van stands in Islamabad. A ceremony was held at Karachi Company G-9 Bus Adda where ANTH’s Managing Director Yasir Khan Niazi and Secretary ITA Asma Sanaullah in presence of Islamabad Traffic Police top officials installed a tobacco control board as part of the Enforcement of Tobacco Control Law in the city.

ANTH’s Executive Director Col (retd) Dr Ghulam Mujtaba Abbasi, Director Hospital Dr Areej Neyazi and Project Director Islamabad Dental Hospital Dr Khurshid Ahmad were present on this occasion. Secretary ITA and Health Ministry officials thanked ANTH and IMDC management for the support of district administration and health ministry in taking initiative of making Islamabad a tobacco smoke free city. They

expressed their determination for making Islamabad a completely smoke-free zone for its inhabitants, saying that the cooperation of organizations like ANTH is valuable for achieving this goal.

Yasir Niazi paid gratitude to the Health Ministry and ICT administration for making the hospital part of the Smoke Free Islamabad project, expressing that the hospital would always be standing with them for the success of this project. Imran Ali Ghouri, Head of Communications at ANTH told journalists that the hospital will keep working closely with the Ministry of Health, WHO, ICT administration on the Smoke-Free Islamabad project to create mass awareness and that the hospital is set to soon open a tobacco cessation clinic to help make Pakistan a tobacco smoke free country.

[https://www.nation.com.pk/07-Feb-2023/anth-joins-hands-with-ict-admin-to-install-no-smoking-board-s-in-islamabad?fbclid=IwAR1zFKJfRe9nV8xJcYv6qe3I9pUJIVACToJ14mdVOGbpNgwhj1sq\\_phtBW3vl](https://www.nation.com.pk/07-Feb-2023/anth-joins-hands-with-ict-admin-to-install-no-smoking-board-s-in-islamabad?fbclid=IwAR1zFKJfRe9nV8xJcYv6qe3I9pUJIVACToJ14mdVOGbpNgwhj1sq_phtBW3vl)

Established in 2018, ARI is an initiative aimed at filling gaps in research and advocacy on ending combustible smoking in a generation. Supported by the Foundation for A Smoke-Free World (FSFW), ARI established the Pakistan Alliance for Nicotine and Tobacco Harm Reduction (PANTHR) in 2019 to promote innovative solutions for smoking cessation.

To know more about us, please visit: [www.aripk.com](http://www.aripk.com) and [www.panthr.org](http://www.panthr.org)

Follow us on [www.facebook.com/ari.panthr/](https://www.facebook.com/ari.panthr/) | [https://twitter.com/ARI\\_PANTHR](https://twitter.com/ARI_PANTHR) | <https://instagram.com/ari.panthr>

Islamabad, Pakistan | Email: [info@aripk.com](mailto:info@aripk.com)