# ARI calls for providing free smoking cessation services

ISLAMABAD: Alternative Research Initiative (ARI) and its partners across Pakistan have urged the federal and provincial governments to provide free cessation services for adult smokers and establish balanced regulations for alternative tobacco products.

On the occasion of World No Tobacco Day, they maintained that for achieving the target of a smoke-free Pakistan, adult smokers need help to quit, ensuring free cessation services are available at the district level. “At the same time, every effort should be made to keep the young away from smoking,” said Arshad Ali Syed, project director of ARI.

Arshad added that New Zealand passed a groundbreaking law that permanently banned cigarette sales to anyone born after 2008. “Given the bulge of young population in Pakistan, the country needs such a law. As time progresses, fewer people will be legally allowed to buy tobacco, effectively phasing out smoking for future generations,” he said.

Alternative tobacco products are being sold and used in Pakistan in a policy vacuum. “This needs to be addressed on an urgent basis. Less harmful alternative tobacco products can help in bringing down the smoking prevalence, provided their use is sensibly regulated.”

Arshad said 20 years ago, Pakistan ratified the FCTC, but the problem of combustible smoking persists. “With more than 31 million tobacco users, Pakistan needs to review its tobacco control framework. There is a need to explore the possibilities that alternative tobacco products offer.”

He added that the world was moving toward eliminating combustible smoking, but unfortunately, Pakistan is still relying on the policy of disrupting the supply and demand of cigarettes. “Over the last two decades, this has not worked.”

ARI and its partner organizations believe the time for action is now. With concerted efforts from policymakers, public health advocates, and the community, Pakistan can pave the way for a healthier, smoke-free society.

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## Alternative Research Initiative (ARI)

ARI provides research-based solutions in social fields, including health, education, governance, and culture, among others, in Pakistan. Established in 2018, ARI provides analytical research and outreach services, identifying and analyzing social issues to offer long-term, practical, and innovative solutions for both the public and private sectors.

## Our work

ARI is working on ending combustible smoking in a generation in Pakistan. While remaining committed to and supporting tobacco control efforts in Pakistan, especially Article 14 of FCTC, ARI serves as a platform for advocating and promoting all innovative solutions for ending smoking, whether counselling, NRTs, or harm reduction.