

JOINT STATEMENT

WA GOVERNMENT ACTION NEEDED TO ADDRESS VAPING

June 2023

We, the undersigned public health, medical and community organisations urge the WA Government to strengthen our laws and improve enforcement in relation to e-cigarettes.

E-cigarettes are harmful to health and are a gateway to tobacco use¹. Alarmingly, the use of e-cigarettes has significantly increased among young people². The dramatic growth in the number of vape stores in WA³ and the widespread availability of e-cigarettes (with unknown nicotine content and chemical composition) indicates that current compliance and enforcement measures are inadequate.

To address the e-cigarette crisis, the Federal Government has recently announced that it will pursue new controls on the importation of e-cigarettes, their contents and packaging⁴. This will include stopping the importation of non-prescription e-cigarettes and banning all single use, disposable e-cigarettes.

To complement these reforms, it is essential to take strong and immediate action at the state level. Specifically, we urge the WA Government to:

- Amend state legislation to explicitly prohibit the sale and supply of non-prescription e-cigarettes, components and liquids, in order to aid enforcement;
- Prohibit advertising, promotion and sponsorship in relation to e-cigarettes, components and liquids to ensure these products cannot be promoted, whether or not they contain nicotine;
- Prohibit the use of e-cigarettes in public places where tobacco smoking is prohibited to denormalise e-cigarette use and protect the community from second-hand and third-hand exposure to aerosols⁵;
- Increase resourcing for compliance and enforcement measures to deter non-pharmacy retailers from unlawfully selling e-cigarettes;
- Resist the damaging influence of the tobacco and e-cigarette industries that seek to undermine the health of our community for commercial gain.

These regulatory reforms should be undertaken following on from the statutory review of the *Tobacco Products Control Act 2006* (WA), of which a government response is long overdue.

A comprehensive approach that also includes education campaigns, research, prevention programs and cessation services is needed to address this crisis.

We must not repeat the mistakes of the past, where early inaction led to a tobacco epidemic. By acting now, the WA Government can create a positive legacy for the next generation by protecting them from the harms of e-cigarettes.



Explanatory Notes

¹ See Banks E, Yazidjoglou A, Brown S, Nguyen M, Martin M, Beckwith K, Daluwatta A, Campbell S, Joshy G. Electronic cigarettes and health outcomes: systematic review of global evidence. Report for the Australian Department of Health. National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, Canberra: April 2022. Available from: <http://hdl.handle.net/1885/262914>.

This most up-to-date comprehensive systematic review of the global evidence, undertaken recently by The Australian National University (ANU), found:

- conclusive evidence that e-cigarettes can cause burns and injuries including severe injuries serious enough to cause death;
- conclusive evidence that intentional or accidental exposure to nicotine e-liquids can lead to poisoning, which can be severe and can result in death;
- conclusive evidence that use of e-cigarettes can result in acute nicotine toxicity;
- conclusive evidence that use of e-cigarettes can lead to seizures;
- documented cases of interference in cardiac devices;
- conclusive evidence of acute, serious respiratory diseases among both smokers and non-smokers including illness serious enough to require hospitalisation and intubation;
- conclusive evidence that use of e-cigarettes results in increased airborne particulate matter in indoor environments;
- substantial evidence that e-cigarettes can cause fires and environmental waste; and
- substantial evidence of dependence on e-cigarettes among non-smokers.

In addition, the review could provide no reassurance (i.e., found that there is no available evidence) that e-cigarette use by non-smokers does not also increase the risk of cardiovascular conditions, cancer, diabetes or other as yet unidentified health problems.

Finally, there is strong evidence that non-smokers who use e-cigarettes are three times as likely to go on to smoke combustible tobacco cigarettes as non-users, supportive of a gateway effect.

² In 2019, 26.1% of people aged 18-24 reported ever-use of e-cigarettes compared to fewer than ten percent among those 40 years and older – see Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Data tables: National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2019 - 2. Tobacco smoking chapter, Supplementary data tables. Canberra: AIHW, 2020. Available from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/illegal-use-of-drugs/national-drug-strategy-household-survey-2019/data>.

In the 2017 Australian Secondary Students' Alcohol and Drug Survey (ASSAD), 14% of 12-17 year old school students indicated that they had tried e-cigarettes. These figures are expected to be significantly higher when results of this year's ASSAD are released (currently in field) – see Guerin N and White V. ASSAD 2017 Statistics & Trends: Australian secondary school students' use of tobacco, alcohol, over-the-counter drugs, and illicit substances: Second Edition. Cancer Council Victoria, 2020. Available from: <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020/07/secondary-school-students-use-of-tobacco-alcohol-and-other-drugs-in-2017.pdf>.

It has been reported that nearly 4000 suspensions were handed out at WA public schools in 2022 for vaping – see Hiatt B. Shocking statistics reveal nearly 4000 suspensions handed out at public schools for vaping. The West Australian: Perth, 10 February 2023. Available from: <https://www.perthnow.com.au/news/education/shocking-statistics-reveal-nearly-4000-suspensions-handed-out-at-public-schools-for-vaping-c-9719976>.

³ There are 194 e-cigarette stores in WA (where a primary purpose of the store is to sell e-cigarette products) – see Wood L, Tuson M, Gazey A, Wood I. (2023). Reducing Tobacco Availability in WA: Mapping the Location and Density of Tobacco Retailers and Modelling Reduction Strategies. Institute for Health Research, The University of Notre Dame Australia.

⁴ The Hon Mark Butler MP. Media Release – Taking action on smoking and vaping. Australia: Department of Health and Aged Care, 2 May 2023. Available from: <https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-mark-butler-mp/media/taking-action-on-smoking-and-vaping?language=en>.

⁵ See Brooks A, Buchanan T, Oakes W. Smoke-free environments: current status and remaining challenges in Australia. PHRP 2020;30(3):e3032022 Available from: <https://www.phrp.com.au/issues/september-2020-volume-30-issue-3/smoke-free-environments-in-australia/>.

Soule EK, Maloney SF, Spindle TR, Rudy AK, Hiler MM, et al. Electronic cigarette use and indoor air quality in a natural setting. Tobacco Control, 2017; 26(1):109–12. Available from: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26880745>.

Hess I, Lachireddy K, and Capon A. A systematic review of the health risks from passive exposure to electronic cigarette vapour. Public Health Research & Practice, 2016; 26(2):e2621617. Available from: <http://www.phrp.com.au/issues/april-2016-volume-26-issue-2/a-systematic-review-of-the-health-risks-from-passive-exposure-to-electronic-cigarette-vapour/>.

Greenhalgh, EM, & Scollo, MM. 18.0 Introduction. In Greenhalgh, EM, Scollo, MM and Winstanley, MH [editors]. Tobacco in Australia: Facts and issues. Melbourne: Cancer Council Victoria; 2023. Available from: <https://www.tobaccoinaustralia.org.au/chapter-18-e-cigarettes/18-0-introduction>