

ALTERNATIVE RESEARCH INITIATIVE NEWSLETTER

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Inside

Page 2

Vaping may help people quit smoking cigarettes after all

Page 3

Royal College of Physicians urges tighter e-cigarette regulations
Govt urged to plan for ending combustible smoking in Pakistan

Page 4

No smoke, less harm: A path to saving lives

FSFW relaunches as Global Action to End Smoking

Global Action to End Smoking, formerly known as the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World, announced it will fund research by the Urban Institute to study tobacco-use disorder and nicotine dependence among low-income individuals in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. The work conducted by Urban's Health Policy Center will further understanding of the challenges of quitting among the country's marginalized and most vulnerable populations. Additionally, it will fill a critical equity research gap relating to the effective delivery of tobacco cessation and treatment and provide tangible solutions designed to reduce smoking rates and improve public health. "We're thrilled to work with the experts at the Urban Institute, who will carry out the important work of quantifying the magnitude of the problem of the smoking epidemic among low-income individuals in the U.S.," said Cliff Douglas, President of Global Action to End Smoking. "Understanding the barriers to cessation is the first step to overcoming them. This work reflects our commitment to end the smoking epidemic worldwide by helping us better understand how best to empower those at the greatest risk of suffering illness and premature death from smoking."

With support from a Global Action grant, Urban's health researchers will analyze data from state Medicaid programs on treatments for tobacco-use disorder from 2019 to 2026.

This research will allow the experts to estimate the prevalence of smoking and vaping rates among people with low incomes and examine the potential impact of the 2023 and 2024 Medicaid disenrollment on people who smoke. The findings of this work will identify and provide recommendations for the health community, policymakers, and everyday consumers of tobacco products. Urban is a leading nonprofit research organization that provides data and evidence to help advance upward mobility and equity.

"Our research will offer key insights into Medicaid prescribing trends for tobacco use disorder and nicotine dependence treatments," said Urban Institute senior research fellow Lisa



**GLOBAL
ACTION**
TO END SMOKING

Accelerating
Research &
Education to
Save Lives

Global Action to End Smoking is the relaunch of the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World. The charitable organization's rebrand reflects a new approach to achieving its mission to end the smoking epidemic.

Clemans-Cope. "This work will inform efforts to enhance health outcomes and minimize disparities for the leading cause of preventable death and disease."

The Urban Institute grant falls under Global Action's newly established Cessation Education program. In addition to continuing to fund research under its Health and Science Research focus area, grants within the Cessation Education program will focus on unearthing challenges to quitting and on better educating consumers, health-care providers, and key public-health stakeholders on the ways people who smoke can improve their health by quitting and moving down the continuum of risk. The work funded in this space focuses on marginal-

ized communities and low- and middle-income countries, where 80% of the world's tobacco users live.

The Cessation Education initiative is an expansion of Global Action's existing grant program area that raises awareness of the many

cessation strategies and tools available to people who smoke. In addition to the new program, the revamped Global Action website (www.globalactiontoendsmoking.org) will provide the public with the latest evidence-based information on smoking cessation and risk minimization as a living resource for consumers and health care providers.

"Global Action is energized by our work across the world, from the United Kingdom to Pakistan and the Philippines, because smoking is a truly global epidemic. With the new grant to Urban Institute, we are elevating the work of an institution that will focus on empathy, understanding, and solutions for people who smoke, rather than the judgment and shame they too

often face," continued Douglas. Global Action to End Smoking is the relaunch of the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World. The charitable organization's rebrand reflects a new approach to achieving its mission to end the smoking epidemic. While Global Action's grantmaking will continue to focus on advancing health and science research for robust smoking cessation and reduced-risk solutions, it will also disseminate research findings and information to support people who smoke through its new Cessation Education program. Additionally, Global Action's Agricultural Transformation Initiative will continue to assist smallholder farmers in moving away from dependence on tobacco growing to

achieving more healthful and sustainable livelihoods in Malawi. Through September 2023, the organization received charitable gifts from PMI Global Services, Inc ("PMI") while operating as an entirely independent entity. In October 2023, the organization ended its prior funding agreement with PMI. Global Action has since adopted a formal policy that it will not seek or accept funding from any industry that manufactures tobacco products or non-medicinal nicotine products.

<https://globalactiontoendsmoking.org/news-and-press/press/global-action-to-end-smoking-formerly-foundation-for-a-smoke-free-world-awards-grant-to-urban-institute-to-address-quitting-barriers-and-solutions-in-marginalized-communities/>

Vaping may help people quit smoking cigarettes after all

Combustible cigarette smokers are now more likely to quit if they start on e-cigarettes, a trend not seen a decade ago, according to longitudinal data from adults in the Population Assessment of Tobacco and Health (PATH) study. Between 2016-2017 and 2018-2019, 20.1% of adult smokers who used electronic nicotine delivery systems discontinued cigarette smoking at follow-up compared with 16.5% of those who did not use e-cigarettes ($P < 0.05$), reported Karin Kasza, PhD, of Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center in Buffalo, New York, and co-authors. This trend continued between 2018-2019 to 2021, with 30.9% of those who used e-cigarettes discontinuing cigarette smoking at follow-up compared with 20% of those who did not use e-cigarettes ($P < 0.001$), they detailed in Nicotine & Tobacco Research opens in a new tab or window. Of note, between 2013 and 2016, rates of discontinuing cigarette smoking among U.S. adults were almost identical between those who used e-cigarettes, at 15.5%, and those who did not, at 15.6%.

"Our findings here suggest that the times have changed when it comes to vaping and smoking cessation for adults in the U.S.," said Kasza in a press release opens in a new tab or window. "While our study doesn't give the answers as to why vaping is associated with cigarette quitting in the population today when it wasn't associated with quitting years ago, design changes leading to e-cigarettes that deliver nicotine more effectively should be investigated. This work underscores the importance of using the most recent data to inform public health decisions."

The researchers explained that in the nearly 20 years since electronic nicotine delivery system products entered the market, there have been varied results regarding the role they play in quitting smoking. These findings follow a recent randomized trial opens in a new tab or window that showed e-cigarettes helped people better stick to smoking cessation. "Our full study period spanned a time in the United States when the ENDS [electronic nicotine delivery systems] marketplace was expanding; salt-based nicotine formulations gained market share in 2016 and ENDS products became available with increased nicotine yields over time, prevalence of ENDS use and frequent ENDS use was increasing, and various tobacco control actions were taken at state and federal levels," the group wrote.

"Inconsistent findings may be due in part to differences in the samples and measures considered, differences in analytic approaches used, and/or may be because of the rapidly changing product environment or differing policy contexts," they added.

Joan Burnham, MSN, RN, an oncology nurse navigator at Houston Methodist Sugar Land Hospital in Texas, told MedPage Today via email that one factor that may contribute to e-cigarettes working as a smoking cessation tool is the nicotine concentration of those devices, which may be higher than those of regular cigarettes.

"The difficulty in quitting smoking is related to the nicotine addiction that people have to go through when quitting," she said. "If you are getting a higher level of nicotine from the ENDS, the withdrawal and nicotine craving is completely alleviated." Farrah Kheradmand, MD, of Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, stressed that replacing one type of nicotine with another can still be dangerous.

She told MedPage Today that some research indicates high relapse rates among those who switch from smoking to a form of nicotine replacement, and that the urge to smoke will likely remain, as "using nicotine in an electronic cigarette is a sure sign of nicotine dependency."

"Therefore, all in all, I would not see these data as encouraging or suggestive that electronic cigarettes enable adults to quit smoking. They are replacing nicotine usage from one type to another, which will not result in true smoking cessation," she said.

For this study, Kasza and team used data on adults ages 21 and up from waves 1-6 (2013-2021) of the PATH study. Median age was 41, 54% were men, 64.6% were white, 15.1% were Black, and 13.5% were Hispanic. Some level of college or an associate's degree was the most common education level, at 33.4%, followed by high school graduates at 27.3%, less than a high school/general equivalency diploma at 25.5%, and a Bachelor's degree or more at 13.4%. Participants completed audio computer-assisted self-interviews that were provided to them in either English or Spanish. Since wave 6 overlapped with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, interview data were obtained via both audio computer-assisted self-interviews and telephone interviews.

The researchers noted that limitations to the study included the fact that data on e-cigarette use were not tracked between baseline and follow-up waves and subgroup analyses for different patient populations were not conducted. Furthermore, the reasons why people stopped smoking regular cigarettes were not identified.

https://www.medpagetoday.com/pulmonology/smoking/109496?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR0qMyFLJQySKtlbEwWpvzjyf_zOCvc5BX-taDFXrfvRAB40QUcVN9rPsm_aem_ASiq-5WUOsmFy_FipcLZKqisSPQnENZMtD2O2_C9kdpD29dkDFAbBRIjcc_5R13w3NmWH8jCByoj1cibuwwTmxe

Royal College of Physicians urges tighter e-cigarette regulations

Royal College of Physicians (RCP) highlights E-cigarettes as a tool for reducing tobacco harm and calls for tighter regulations to protect non-smokers, particularly young people.

E-cigarettes are still valuable in combating the effects of tobacco use, yet steps should be taken to minimize their allure, accessibility, and affordability to non-smokers, especially youths, while also addressing environmental concerns, says a report from the UK Royal College of Physicians.

The primary discovery of the report from the UK Royal College of Physicians examines the role of e-cigarettes in preventing fatalities, disabilities, and disparities associated with tobacco usage.

The report, E-cigarettes and harm reduction: An evidence review, reviews how e-cigarettes can be used to support more people to make quit attempts while discouraging young people and never-smokers from taking up e-cigarette use.

“E-cigarettes should be promoted as an effective means of helping people who smoke to quit smoking tobacco,” it said.

Comprehensive evidence reviews on the role of e-cigarettes have been commissioned in the UK at regular intervals by Public Health England (PHE) and subsequently the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID).

The report examines trends in tobacco and vaping use, the effectiveness of e-cigarettes to treat tobacco addiction, the differences in health effects of vaping in people who smoke, vape or do neither, the role of the tobacco industry in the rising use of e-cigarettes, and the ethical dilemmas presented by e-cigarettes.



Royal College of Physicians

There is a marked variation in international approaches to e-cigarettes. It added that current evidence suggests nicotine itself confers little risk to health, though acute exposure at typical levels from consumer nicotine products can result in addiction, short-term enhanced cognitive effects, elevated heart rate and systolic blood pressure. It will, however, take decades to accurately quantify any effects of long-term non-tobacco nicotine use.

The report maintained e-cigarettes may have a benefit in both stopping smoking and harm reduction in smokers with

mental illness, including those who are not motivated to quit and have been unable to quit before.

The report calls for regulating vaping to protect young people and never smokers

from vaping. It wants to raise the prices of vaping by introducing an excise tax and minimum unit pricing while banning multi-buy purchases but making sure they remain a less expensive option for adults using them to quit smoking. The report also calls for restricting ‘point of sale’ in store promotional materials and product visibility, and restricting promotion on social media, along with ensuring Trading Standards services are sufficiently resourced to effectively enforce e-cigarette sales legislation and reduce underage sales. The RCP wants vaping products to be less appealing to young people by introducing standardized packaging and flavor descriptors.

<https://www.app.com.pk/national/royal-college-of-physicians-urges-tighter-e-cigarette-regulations/>

End combustible smoking in Pakistan

Alternative Research Initiative (ARI) and its partners have called upon the federal and provincial governments to plan for ending combustible smoking.

“As we approach the World No Tobacco Day (WNTD), let’s set a target for ending combustible smoking and start working towards that aim,” said Arshad Ali Syed, head of ARI. He added that a number of developed countries are moving towards a smoke-free future. These countries, according to him, have realistically assessed the current smoking prevalences and keeping in view their resources, have set targets for ending combustible smoking. “Pakistan has not taken the first step in this direction,” he said.

According to WHO, around 80% of the world’s 1.3 billion tobacco users live in low- and middle-income countries. Pakistan today has more than 31 million tobacco users, with more than half of them smokers.

Arshad said the role of the provincial governments was critical

in taking the first step to ending combustible smoking. However, he regretted that there has been almost no initiative at provincial level in this regard. He said every year on WNTD, the provincial health ministries and other related departments

remain conspicuous by their absence. The first step, he added, should be the provision of cessation services across Pakistan for the adult smoker. “These cessation services should be provided as a basic human right.” Additionally, he added Pakistan should make tobacco harm reduction part of its tobacco control initiatives.

ARI and its partners, Arshad said, support the government’s initiatives for tobacco control, including the increase in the federal excise tax on cigarettes. However, he said there was a need to go beyond these measures.

Pakistan should assess the volume of tobacco

use afresh and then set a target for ending combustible smoking, he said, adding that the provinces would have to take a leading role on this front.



No smoke, less harm: A path to saving lives

Despite decades of public health campaigns highlighting the dangers of smoking, misconceptions and misinformation about nicotine persist. Contrary to popular belief, nicotine itself does not cause cancer and plays a minimal role, if any, in tobacco-related diseases. It's time to dispel these myths and acknowledge the potential of tobacco harm reduction (THR) strategies in saving millions of lives.

It is essential to recognise that there will always be individuals who choose to consume nicotine, much like those who consume caffeine. It is known that humans have used nicotine for more than 12,000 years; it is foolhardy for modern policy-makers to believe that they can be the ones to eradicate it. Smokefree Sweden's new report, No Smoke, Less Harm, illustrates that rather than demonising nicotine, the focus should shift towards reducing the harm associated with its consumption. Sweden serves as a prime example of how THR can mitigate tobacco-related diseases despite similar levels of nicotine consumption compared to other European countries. By embracing smoke-free nicotine products, Sweden has significantly lower rates of tobacco-related illnesses and premature deaths.

Compared to the rest of the European Union (EU), Sweden boasts 44 percent fewer tobacco-related deaths, a 41 percent lower cancer rate, and 38 percent fewer deaths attributable to any cancer. If Sweden's approach to reducing the use of combustible products rather than a puritan war against consumption of nicotine is replicated across the EU, many millions of lives could be saved in just a few years.

Consumers are increasingly understanding this concept, while governments have mostly not. Those who have successfully moved away from smoking using snus, vaping products, and other safer alternatives are constantly frustrated and confused as to why the huge benefits that they have experienced are not being recognised by legislators.

The concept of harm reduction is not new. It's about enabling consumers to use potentially harmful substances in less risky ways, thereby preventing the devastating health consequences. This principle, encapsulated in the motto "No Smoke, Less Harm," should inform the global approach to tobacco control policy. It's time for institutions like the World Health Organization (WHO) – which has long endorsed harm reduction for drug use - to formally integrate THR as the fourth pillar of tobacco control, alongside taxation, regulation, and education. Harm reduction products offer a perfect alignment of business, economic, and public health goals without the state having to do anything but allow them to be sold to adults who would otherwise smoke.

To achieve meaningful progress in tobacco harm reduction, several actions must be taken. First and foremost, EU and WHO member states must adopt a risk-proportionate regulatory framework that distinguishes between smoked and smoke-free nicotine products. This approach recognises the varying levels of risk associated with different nicotine

delivery methods and allows consumers access to safer alternatives.

Furthermore, combating nicotine misinformation is paramount. Misconceptions about the risks of nicotine can deter smokers from transitioning to safer alternatives. It's crucial to actively eliminate false narratives and provide accurate information about the relative risks of different nicotine products.

Research plays a pivotal role in building the evidence base for tobacco harm reduction. All stakeholders, including governments, research institutions, and industry, should invest in rigorous scientific studies to evaluate the safety and efficacy of THR strategies. By gathering robust evidence, public health policies can be better informed and consumers will be empowered to make smart and life-saving choices about their health.

At the heart of THR lies an ethical imperative: the recognition of consumers' fundamental human right to health. Individuals have the right to access accurate information and safer alternatives to smoking. By respecting this right, policymakers can support THR initiatives that prioritise public health and individual autonomy.

Lastly, monitoring and evaluation are essential components of effective tobacco harm reduction strategies. WHO and member states must step up efforts to track the impact of THR interventions, including changes in smoking prevalence, tobacco-related diseases, and public perceptions of nicotine use.

We have overwhelming data now to show that harm reduction works. The Swedish experience has shown conclusively that abstinence only policies are vastly inferior to those which meet the consumer where they are instead of where governments wish them to be. There is no longer any meaningful justification for pursuing futile policies to restrict nicotine use instead of accepting that, like coffee, there will always be those who consume it.

The real public health enemy is smoking combustible tobacco, not nicotine.

Embracing THR is not only a pragmatic approach to reducing the burden of tobacco-related diseases but also a moral imperative. By fundamentally differentiating between smoked and smoke-free products and adopting risk-proportionate regulatory frameworks, millions of lives can be saved. It just takes enlightened policymakers to recognise that, not bury their heads in the sand like the WHO.

It's time to prioritise THR awareness and adoption, dismantle nicotine misconceptions, and uphold consumers' right to health. A future can be built where tobacco-related diseases are relegated to the past, and every individual has the opportunity to lead a healthier, smoke-free life, if only influential organisations adhere to a simple, progressive mantra.

<https://www.tobaccoharmreduction.net/en/article/no-smoke-less-harm-a-path-to-saving-lives>

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.

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