



The Asia Pacific (APAC) Declaration

Member organisations of the Coalition of Asia Pacific Tobacco Harm Reduction Advocates call upon Public Health Experts and Governments in the Asia Pacific Region (WHO SEARO and WHO WPRO designated countries) to put the health of their people first and support Tobacco Harm Reduction.

Over 2 million people in the region will die from unsafe tobacco products, such as combustible and unsafe oral tobacco products that are native to the region. We are extremely concerned that decisions are being made in various conferences and regional meetings that are not considering the body of scientific evidence that proves the benefits of safer nicotine products such as e cigarettes, heated tobacco and snus - which could displace the deadly products and add years of life and productivity to the lives of those 2 million who will die otherwise.

On behalf of the millions of adults who use safer nicotine products, and in support of the six hundred million smokers across the region who deserve access to safer alternatives, we call on the Pfizer and Bloomberg funded Asia Pacific Conference on Tobacco or Health to stop pushing failed policies supported by their funders, but rejected by scientists, researchers and leading democracies around the world.

We urge all officials in APAC to:

Realise that smoking causes the vast majority of tobacco-related death and disease. Burning tobacco (combustion) is the main cause of smoking related disease, not nicotine or inhaling vapour. Tobacco use causes over 2 million deaths per year in Asia Pacific, and smoking causes the majority of those deaths. There are more than a billion smokers today and WHO estimates that more than a billion smokers will still smoke ten years from now. E-cigarettes and safer nicotine products have provided us, and can provide smokers with an option to get away from smoking and could hasten the demise of the cigarette. We should all want to see that.

Recognise that safer nicotine products are dramatically safer than cigarettes and have already helped millions switch away from smoking or unsafe oral tobacco. Vaping and heated tobacco products are not the same as not smoking. Both the products use electronic devices to generate a nicotine-containing vapour without burning tobacco. Public Health England's annual reviews of all available evidence have consistently concluded that e-cigarettes are around 95% less harmful than smoking. Millions of people have switched from cigarettes to these significantly safer products. Governments charged with protecting public health should welcome that, not discourage it.

Recall that harm reduction is at the core of international treaty obligations. The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control defines ‘tobacco control’ as ‘a range of supply, demand and harm reduction strategies that aim to improve the health of a population’. Thailand has been an important leader in using harm reduction strategies to improve public health in other contexts. It should embrace tobacco harm reduction as well.

Realise that vapers and smokers pay the price for undue precaution. Banning indisputably safer products while awaiting scientific certainty consigns hundreds of millions of smokers to premature death and disease and forces consumers of safer nicotine products to choose between breaking the law and smuggling in their products and returning to combustible smoking. That is unacceptable.

Regulate rather than ban. Bans serve only to protect the cigarette industry. Concerns that vaping may appeal to youth or may serve as a ‘gateway’ to smoking are inconsistent with the evidence: E-cigarettes have been gateways out of smoking for millions and have been accompanied by declining youth smoking rates. Instead of banning them, the Government should regulate e-cigarettes to maximise the benefits of low risk alternatives while minimising the likelihood they will be used by youth or non-smokers.

Risk Proportionate Regulation. Safer nicotine products should be subject to balanced regulation but must be regulated proportionate to harm, and not the same as cigarettes and smoking. They should be prohibited for youth. They should have health warnings. They should be subject to appropriate, consumer based quality and safety standards. They should not be regulated as medicines. Requiring clinical studies proving “safety and efficacy” is an inappropriately high standard for consumer products that are indisputably safer than their alternative. Bans only serve to protect the cigarette industry.

Rethink dogma. Safer products should be encouraged, not attacked with the same vehemence as cigarettes or, worse, banned. Smokers’ health and the Government’s credibility is at stake: There has been enough verifiable scientific evidence that safer nicotine products are much less harmful than combustible and unsafe oral tobacco. There has also been enough verifiable statistical evidence to show that risk proportionate regulation that guarantees access to adults who would benefit from the products, will immediately reduce the access to those under the age of majority. Our health and the government’s credibility is at stake: Countries need to avoid being perceived as promoting the interests of cigarette and pharmaceutical industries, and we should not be forced to choose between deadly tobacco products and marginally effective nicotine replacement therapies.

Remember that public health is about people. Accept the body of scientific evidence and the professional opinion of public health colleagues who have stated, unequivocally, that they know that safer nicotine products are significantly safer than combustible tobacco. You know that millions of smokers have been unsuccessful quitting with the current options available. You know that safer nicotine products have helped millions globally move off the deadly alternative. It is time for public health officials and governments to tell the millions of vapers and billions of smokers the truth. Switching to a safer nicotine product is better for the individual, and better for public health, than to continue smoking.

Simply tell the truth: Switching to a regulated safer nicotine product is better than continuing to smoke or use unsafe oral tobacco products.

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by the members of the Coalition of Asia Pacific Tobacco Harm Reduction Advocates:

