

Ensuring Adults Understand and Access Safer Alternatives

Reducing the global burden of smoking-related disease requires more than just restrictive policies. It requires empowering adults who smoke with accurate information and meaningful access to safer alternatives. Tobacco harm reduction is rooted in the principle of informed choice. Without public health strategies that prioritize transparency, accessibility, and education, millions will continue to suffer the consequences of combustible tobacco use.

There is strong scientific consensus that products such as e-cigarettes, nicotine pouches, and heated tobacco are significantly less harmful than smoking¹. Despite this, widespread misinformation and overly restrictive regulations continue to limit adult access to these alternatives. Many adults who smoke remain unaware of the relative risks of different nicotine products, while others are unable to switch due to legal bans or the high cost of alternatives.

This problem is particularly acute in low- and middle-income countries, where public health resources and cessation support are often limited². In these regions, banning or severely restricting reduced-risk products protects cigarette sales rather than public health. It also undermines the right to access tools that can support better health outcomes.

Countries like the United Kingdom and New Zealand offer clear examples of what can work. By aligning regulations with scientific evidence and supporting public education, they have achieved historic declines in smoking rates. Their success proves that pragmatic, science-based, and risk-proportionate approaches can save lives.³

Public health agencies, regulators, and governments must shift away from prohibitionist approaches and embrace practical solutions. This includes ensuring adults can legally access a range of regulated, safer nicotine alternatives. It also means investing in public education campaigns that are grounded in scientific evidence, and ensuring that consumers have a voice in shaping tobacco harm reduction policy.

Supporting informed choice weakens the cigarette industry. Denying it protects the status quo. The choice should be clear: making safer alternatives accessible and understandable is not just good policy – it is a moral imperative.

C.Y. Virgino - clarisse@caphraorg.net
N.E. Loucas - neloucas@caphraorg.net

¹ <https://www.cochrane.org/news/latest-cochrane-review-finds-high-certainty-evidence-nicotine-e-cigarettes-are-more-effective>

² https://aspireaotearoa.org.nz/sites/default/files/2022-07/b4_ak_systematic-review-lmics_sf2025_wellington_nov2018.pdf

³ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0091743518301981>