



Position Statement: Smoking and Vaping Cessation

Andy Mark, BSc, MPH

National Heart Foundation of Australia

Smoking remains the leading cause of preventable death in Australia, claiming over 20,000 lives each year [1]. Upon quitting, the risk of coronary heart disease declines, as does the risk of death in people with existing cardiovascular disease [2]. Health professionals should offer cessation support at every opportunity. First-line treatment for smoking cessation is behavioural intervention (such as through Quitline, available nationally) combined with pharmacotherapies approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration.

Electronic cigarettes ('e-cigarettes' or 'vapes') are being increasingly promoted for smoking cessation. This is despite the fact their long-term safety remains unknown and their effectiveness as a smoking cessation aid continues to be debated. There is some evidence of benefit compared to nicotine replacement therapy from small randomised controlled trials, while comparisons of e-cigarettes to varenicline are limited [3]. However, there is emerging evidence for harmful cardiovascular effects. According to a 2021 World Heart Federation policy brief, e-cigarettes have been associated with increases in heart rate and blood pressure, vascular changes, and an increased risk of myocardial infarction compared to non-smokers [4].

On 1 October 2021, Australian legislation came into effect whereby consumers can only access nicotine vaping products (NVPs) with a prescription from a medical practitioner. The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners has developed guidance to support doctors in prescribing NVPs. The guidance states it is valid and reasonable for doctors to choose not to prescribe these products [5].

The Heart Foundation and Quit have developed a joint position statement on smoking and vaping cessation, which provides key messages for health professionals, including:

- A prescribed NVP should only be considered as a treatment option for smoking cessation if first-line treatment has repeatedly been unsuccessful, given people often need to make several quit attempts before successfully quitting.
- Given the lack of evidence for their safety, quality and efficacy, and the availability of approved pharmacotherapies, we do not encourage the use of NVPs for smoking cessation.

This position statement has been endorsed by health organisations including Lung Foundation Australia, the Stroke Foundation, the Australian Cardiovascular Health and Rehabilitation Association, the Public Health Association of Australia and the Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association.

Read the position statement here: <https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/programs/advocacy-smoking-and-tobacco-regulation>

References

- [1] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Australian Burden of Disease Study 2018 – Key findings. 2021. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/burden-of-disease/burden-of-disease-study-2018-key-findings/contents/about>.
- [2] US Department of Health and Human Services. Smoking Cessation. A Report of the Surgeon General. Atlanta, GA: US Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health. 2020. https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/2020-smoking-cessation/index.html.
- [3] Hartmann-Boyce J, McRobbie H, Butler AR, Lindson N, Bullen C, Begh R, et al. Electronic cigarettes for smoking cessation. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews. 2021. <https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD010216.pub6/full>.
- [4] World Heart Federation. E-cigarettes: A new threat to cardiovascular health. 2021. <https://world-heart-federation.org/resource/e-cigarettes-a-new-threat-for-cardiovascular-health-whf-policy-brief/>.
- [5] The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. Supporting smoking cessation: A guide for health professionals. 2019. <https://www.racgp.org.au/clinical-resources/clinical-guidelines/key-racgp-guidelines/view-all-racgp-guidelines/supporting-smoking-cessation>.