

ALTERNATIVE RESEARCH INITIATIVE NEWSLETTER

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Inside

Page 2

The right to health and tobacco cessation

Page 3

Anti-tobacco award

Page 4

European Commission weighs up benefits and risk of e-cigarettes

FSFW urges smokers to quit or switch to harm-reduction products

More than 30 years since the first World No Tobacco Day (WNTD), there are still 8 million annual deaths attributed to tobacco use and more than 1 billion individuals still smoke.

These facts are proof that health policies and actions have not been adequate. The challenges that smokers face when trying to quit have been largely ignored. The calls by the World Health Organization (WHO) for smokers to quit using fairly ineffective interventions suggest we need new approaches. Technology innovation, in the form of harm reduction, offers a new way forward for smokers that complements classic cessation efforts.

On this WNTD, the Foundation urges adult smokers to commit to quit smoking combustibles and chewing toxic smokeless tobacco products or switch to a growing range of less harmful nicotine-based alternatives.

growing evidence that a range of harm-reduction products, including e-cigarettes (vapes), snus, nicotine pouches, and heated tobacco products, can help smokers quit or at least substantially reduce their harmful exposure to combustible cigarettes. The WHO, supported by heavily funded Bloomberg Philanthropies grantees, continues to blindly ignore scientific evidence, vilifying these products instead of promoting their use to save lives."

In a global tobacco smoking trends study published this week in *The Lancet*, the authors say, "Tobacco control is woefully insufficient in many countries around the world" and that evidence-based policies are needed to reduce smoking. However, they never mention a role for tobacco harm-reduction (THR) products as part of tobacco control policy. Yach added, "This study was funded by Bloomberg

In light of the billion smokers that remain, one may assume that the world has made little progress since the first WNTD three decades ago. Yet, from a scientific and technological perspective, we have seen profound change. As a result of transformational research and development, we now have harm-reduction products that could end death and disease from tobacco.

"Since my involvement in the first WNTD in 1988, we have focused narrowly on cessation often without engaging smokers in developing ways they feel work best. Too many efforts have failed because they have not addressed the fact that while many smokers want to quit, they are not being presented with options that appeal to them," said Derek Yach, President of Foundation for a Smoke-Free World. "There is

Philanthropies, which does not support the use of THR products as cessation aides. This is likely one reason why they were not included in the report. Denying the value and benefits of THR products is irresponsible and blatantly discounts the research showing they can help smokers quit."

The Royal College of Physicians (RCP) recently released their UK report, *Smoking and health 2021: A coming age for*

tobacco control? This comes 60 years after they issued the world's first authoritative report on smoking and health. The RCP estimates that if the harm-reduction policies they advocated for in 1962 were adopted, smoking would have ended in the United Kingdom by now. Their new report calls for doctors to play a more active role in helping their patients who smoke. RCP says, "We argue that responsibility for treating smokers lies with the clinician who sees them, and that our NHS should be delivering default, opt-out, systematic interventions for all smokers at the point of service contact." The RCP also recommends that the UK government invest in media campaigns to urge smokers to switch from tobacco to ecigarettes, which are less harmful. Governments and doctors worldwide should heed their advice.

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three decades ago. Yet, from a scientific and technological perspective, we have seen profound change. As a result of transformational research and development, we now have harm-reduction products that could end death and disease from tobacco. Still, innovation translates into saved lives only when smokers have access to the full range of cessation and harm-reduction options. Thus, in the same way that the Foundation calls on smokers to quit, it also calls on policymakers and physicians to embrace the tools that will help them do so.

Read the complete press release at <https://www.smokefreeworld.org/newsroom/on-world-no-tobacco-day-foundation-for-a-smoke-free-world-urges-smokers-to-quit-or-switch-to-harm-reduction-products/>

The right to health and tobacco cessation

Everyone has the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Governments have a duty to strive for the full realization of this right. For tobacco, the absolute minimum government obligation is to provide cessation support for citizens whom they allowed the industry to addict as children.

The responsibility of the tobacco industry, whose marketing has often targeted children, is obvious, and governments should seek ways to force the industry to pay for policies designed to remedy those harms. Note that the qualifying word "attainable" in the right to health does not excuse government inaction, since some cessation interventions are within the reach of even the poorest nations.

It is in governments' own interest to help tobacco users stop, rather than expensively treat their serious disease later, but it is also an obligation. Article 14 of the FCTC, and the Article 14 Guidelines (6) apply to the vast majority of nations (181 so far).

As a binding international treaty within the United Nations system, and falling under the purview of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, Parties to the FCTC have made a commitment to address cessation. The lack of an enforcement mechanism under the FCTC does not nullify this obligation.

Read the full report at <https://2bark924ef5o2dk1z21reqtf-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/2021-Cessation-Report.pdf>



Anti-tobacco award



Somehow there are gaps in the picture. The WHO award to Pakistan for undertaking an effective campaign against tobacco has come as a pleasant surprise to many in a country where smoking is rampant. However, it is fair to ask in what manner the country has benefited from the anti-tobacco drive and to what extent has the consumption of the noxious substance been curtailed.

As the Ministry of National Health Services receives its award on May 31, which is celebrated as World No Tobacco Day, it would do well to mull over the situation and not rest on its recent laurels. For instance, it has been estimated that tobacco consumers in the country number 30m and cost the exchequer Rs615bn in terms of the health burden — by no means a small amount for a country whose healthcare facilities are already overstretched.

However, the government has been lauded for, among other steps, making Islamabad a 'tobacco-smoke-free city' by designating 304 localities and parks as smoke-free in 12 districts. Tobacco sellers have also been registered under this

project, while the health ministry has prohibited all kinds of advertising, promotions and sponsorship of tobacco products on point of sale as well as on social media. And yet the reality on the ground points in another, troubling direction.

Access to smoking products is easy and the availability of the ostensibly banned single cigarettes is especially tempting for students and other young people. Meanwhile, anti-tobacco activists have rightly criticised the authorities for their lax tax policies towards the tobacco industry that help the latter earn huge profits. Indeed, there have been no increased taxes on tobacco products in the past four years whereas the price of other basic commodities has surged.

In such a situation, how can the government's goal of cutting the number of tobacco users by 30pc by 2025 be considered realistic? A rethink is needed on how to act on its intentions and enforce the measures that the government says will curb the use of tobacco.

Dawn editorial published on May 28, 2021

Tobacco Control Cell not disbanded

The Tobacco Control Cell has not been disbanded, according to the Ministry of National Health Services Regulations and Coordination.

Sajid Shah, the ministry's spokesperson, said the cell was not disbanded and only the employees working in it have been removed from service.

"Removing a contractual employee of the donor agency from

the office of the government is misconstrued as akin to ending the cell." He added that the cell is fully functional and working on tobacco control policy while the smoke free cities project is implementing tobacco control laws.

Earlier, it was reported that the Ministry of National Health Services has disbanded the cell and terminated services of its staff.

European Commission weighs up benefits and risk of e-cigarettes

E-cigarettes are promoted in many countries as a safer alternative to tobacco. However, in the European Union, there has been a long-running debate about the health effects of these products.

As e-cigarettes are so new, the European Commission has been cautious when it comes to how they are regulated across the bloc.

At the moment, they are covered by the Tobacco Product Directive as they contain nicotine. However, a new report says they could fall under pharmaceutical regulation in the future.

The report, which was published last month, said the latest assessment of the risk of e-cigarettes by SCHEER (Scientific Committee on Health, Environmental and Emerging Risks) supported “the careful and precautionary approach taken so far.”

“The SCHEER opinion underlined the health consequences [of e-cigarettes] and the important role they play in smoking initiation,” the report said.

On the other hand, vaping advocates, which includes some health experts, say that e-cigarettes are a useful tool in the fight against tobacco, with much higher quit rates than other products.

Studies show that e-cigarettes are less harmful than cigarettes, so they can be used as a quitting aid. But, supporters say that EU policymakers have ignored this evidence so far.

Another argument put forward by some EU officials is that medicalizing e-cigarettes would make them less appealing to consumers. Although it has never been proven, they argue that it would make them less accessible, and this would limit the public health benefits.

The report also denies the idea that e-cigarettes are a harm reduction product, which is something the industry has presented. In the report, it says that they are popular among young adults and first-time smokers, not just smokers trying to quit.

There is evidence that some flavors are targeted at young people and teens. In recent years, some member states have banned certain flavors – like candy – for this reason.

Overall, although there are some risks that come with vaping, the devices do have the potential to offer lower risks than traditional cigarettes. This is something that the Commission will need to consider when reviewing the current regulations.

Taken from EU Policies – www.eu-policies.com

Tobacco Control

Japan, which was once considered a smoker's paradise and ranked among the least protected countries because of tobacco usage, is now on track to become smoke-free. The country has seen a sharp decline in smoking prevalence over the years. It makes one wonder how it has brought about such a drastic yet delightful change.

The Japanese government adopted innovative tobacco control strategies, introduced reduced-risk products and increased consumer awareness to encourage people to stop smoking traditional cigarettes in favour of some less-harmful options. While the sale of cigarettes was already declining in Japan after 2011, it picked up pace manifold from 2016 onwards which was also the time when heated tobacco products were introduced.

These devices that heat tobacco to generate a nicotine aerosol for inhalation, instead of burning it, have been scientifically proven to have a lower risk profile compared to the conventional combustible cigarettes. While cigarettes are available in Japanese market at low prices even today, smokers tend to opt for products that have reduced risks.

This change can happen in Pakistan too if the government increases awareness and introduces alternatives for smokers, keeping their wellbeing at the heart of its efforts.

Taseer Ali, Islamabad

A letter published in Dawn on June 5, 2021

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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