

Press release

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New GSTHR Briefing Paper on the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and the Conference of the Parties calls for bigger role for tobacco harm reduction

The future of tobacco and smoking will be discussed in November 2023 when representatives from more than 180 countries attend [the tenth Conference of the Parties \(COP10\) to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control \(FCTC\)](#) in Panama. This meeting, which is normally held every two years, will influence both the future direction of international tobacco control policies and how they are implemented at a national level.

But, despite their importance, up until now COP meetings have received little attention and their secretive proceedings always take place behind closed doors. [The Global State of Tobacco Harm Reduction project](#) (GSTHR) has therefore produced a comprehensive briefing in a bid to help policymakers, health officials and consumers become better informed about this major international meeting.

Titled "[The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control \(FCTC\) and the Conference of the Parties \(COP\): an explainer](#)", the GSTHR document explains what the FCTC is, what COP meetings are and how they operate.

Published today in English and Spanish, by the GSTHR project, from [Knowledge•Action•Change](#) (K•A•C), a UK public health agency, the new document is an updated, more detailed version of [a Briefing Paper released in the lead up to COP9 in 2021](#).

It is expected that the decisions taken at COP10 will be very significant in determining the future of safer nicotine products (SNP), such as [nicotine vapes \(e-cigarettes\)](#), [snus](#), [nicotine pouches](#) and [heated tobacco products](#). Consumer access to these products is crucial to realise the public health potential of [tobacco harm reduction](#) in the global fight against tobacco-related death and disease.

But while delegations of elected politicians and health officials attend COP10, the media, [consumer organisations advocating for access to safer nicotine products \(SNP\) and tobacco harm reduction](#), and any individuals or organisations with ties to the tobacco industry are excluded from the event.

The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control is an international agreement developed in response to the international nature of the public health challenge of tobacco use and smoking. It was the first treaty negotiated under the auspices of the World Health Organization (WHO) and came into force on 27 February 2005.

Article 1.d of the Convention defines tobacco control as “a range of supply, demand and harm reduction strategies that aim to improve the health of a population by eliminating or reducing their consumption of tobacco products and exposure to tobacco smoke”.

But looking ahead to COP10, Professor Gerry Stimson, Director of K•A•C and Emeritus Professor at Imperial College London, says the harm reduction elements of the convention are being ignored.

He said: “Harm reduction is explicitly named as one of three tobacco control strategies in the opening lines of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control but at present, the indications are that COP10 is unlikely to result in any decisions that support consumer access to safer nicotine products. This must

change. Ignoring the opportunities offered by tobacco harm reduction to reduce smoking-related death and disease demonstrates an unconscionable disregard for the lives of one billion adult smokers, and the future of [the more than 110 million people who have already chosen to improve their health](#) by switching from smoking to safer nicotine products.

“Parties to the FCTC must seize the opportunity in Panama to consider evidence from countries where tobacco harm reduction is saving lives, including the UK, New Zealand, Sweden, Norway and Japan – and ask why the WHO and its influential philanthropic funders are refusing to do the same.

“With no media present, FCTC COP meetings are shrouded in a secrecy more akin to a UN Security Council meeting – and in direct contrast to other COP meetings, for example those on climate change. This Briefing Paper gives policymakers, health officials and consumers more insight into the processes of COP10 and the opportunity to engage more fully prior to and during the event in Panama.”

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About us: [Knowledge·Action·Change](#) (K·A·C) promotes harm reduction as a key public health strategy grounded in human rights. The team has over forty years of experience of harm reduction work in drug use, HIV, smoking, sexual health, and prisons. K·A·C runs the [Global State of Tobacco Harm Reduction \(GSTHR\)](#) which maps the development of tobacco harm reduction and the use, availability and regulatory responses to safer nicotine products, as well as smoking prevalence and related mortality, in over 200 countries and regions around the world. For all publications and live data, visit <https://gsthr.org>

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