

### Inside

#### Page 2

ARI for collective efforts to save youth from smoking

#### Page 3

Belgium becomes first EU country to ban disposable e-cigarettes  
New Zealand launches free vape scheme to help smokers quit smoking

#### Page 4

Single cigarette costs men 17, women 22 minutes of life, study warns  
Milan prohibits all outdoor smoking in Italy's toughest ban to date

# Community-led efforts ignite hope for a smoke-free Pakistan



The Alternative Research Initiative (ARI) and its partner organizations have conducted awareness sessions on ending smoking in 12 districts, six each in Punjab and Sindh, aiming to engage local communities and students in efforts to save youth from smoking, help adults quit, and achieve a smoke-free Pakistan.

In December, these sessions, each in a district, were held in collaboration with the Future Development Foundation in Sargodha, Maimar Development Organization in Faisalabad, Sun Consultant and Enterprises in Multan, Dove Foundation in Bahawalpur, Al-Emaan Development Organization in Dera Ghazi Khan, Workers Education and Research Organization in

Karachi East, Humanitarian Organization for Sustainable Development Pakistan in Hyderabad, Child and Labour Rights Welfare Organization in Karachi South, Sindh Sujag Social Welfare Association in Thatta, Insan Dost Social Organization in Khairpur, and Nari Foundation in Sukkur. In Lahore, Dove Foundation arranged a seminar on ending smoking with the students of Mass Communication Department in Punjab University. The attendees included community leaders, members of civil society, laborers, doctors, mothers, smokers, students, and people from different walks of life. From ARI, Jafar Mehdi and Junaid Ali Khan also attended the sessions. The representatives from ARI's partner organizations elaborat-



ed the health-risk of tobacco products, benefits of quitting; and strategies how community can play role in keeping away youth from smoking and encouraging adults to quit.

They informed the participants that there are more than 31 million tobacco users in the country. Of them, 17 million are cigarette smokers.

The speakers elaborated that when a smoker burns tobacco, the harmful chemicals are produced which cause chronic diseases including cardiac arrest, severe cough, COPD, loss of appetite and different types of cancer. "Smoking kills 160,000 people in Pakistan a year while the economic-cost of smoking-related diseases and deaths is Rs.615bn a year – 1.6% of the country's GDP"

On the other hand, quitting smoking brings immediate benefits for smokers. "Quitting improved their health, life expectancy, and lower health-risk of cancer and cardiovascular diseases for them."

They said tobacco control laws exist in Pakistan but their implementation and provision of effective cessation services remain a missing link. That's why, less than three percent of smokers quit smoking successfully a year. "If smokers want to quit smoking, they don't even know where they can seek help." They stressed it is high for community to declare homes and

public places smoke-free, aware and educate children about hazards of smoking, encourage open communication with youth at homes, and provide medical support to adults or encourage them to switch to reduced-risk products.

Mothers in Multan, Khairpur and students in Karachi, and Lahore events raised concerns over the use of reduced-risk products among youth. The speakers answered that these products are devised for adult smokers who want to quit smoking. Sweden has become the world's first smoke-free country by reducing the adult smoking ratio to 4.6% in the country by implementing anti-smoking laws and encouraging the use of the alternative products – Swedish snus and e-cigarettes. "The alternatives are not for youth and non-smokers; therefore, government needs to regulate the reduced-risk products."

The participants suggested that the awareness sessions should be expanded to schools, colleges, and communities, with setting up cessation clinics at district level. "Collaboration with the government is critical for implementing anti-smoking laws and regulating the reduced-risk products."

Dr. Rabia, a health expert, has agreed to establish a smoking cessation clinic in her facility. Students and participants have pledged to support anti-smoking initiatives and spread awareness.



## ARI for collective efforts to save youth from smoking

ISLAMABAD: Alternative Research Initiative (ARI) and its partners have called for collective efforts of all citizens, communities, and institutions to end combustible smoking in Pakistan.

"It is time everybody comes together to save our youth from the dangers of smoking," said Arshad Ali Syed, Project Director of ARI. He added that combustible smoking remains a leading cause of preventable diseases, including cancer, heart disease, and respiratory illnesses. "The youth are particularly vulnerable, as they are often exposed to smoking at a young age, leading to lifelong addiction and health issues."

With more than 31 million smokers, two in five smokers in Pakistan start cigarette smoking before the age of 10 years. Though Pakistan ratified the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) in 2004, it is still one of the countries with a heavy burden of disease because of combustible smoking.

While Pakistan has made progress in some areas, there is still a long way to go to fully comply with the FCTC and reduce the burden of tobacco-related diseases.

Arshad regretted that smoking by the youth is seen as a normal part of growing up. "A habit which leads to lifelong health issues is accepted without much concern."

He called for increased awareness about the harmful effects of smoking, backed by comprehensive education programs in schools and communities. He also highlighted the importance of cessation services. "There should be robust support systems for those attempting to quit smoking, including counseling and access to cessation programs."

Arshad maintained that parents, educators, healthcare professionals, policymakers, and community leaders must collectively work to make Pakistan smoke-free. "The collective efforts should be initiated countrywide urgently."

## Belgium becomes first EU country to ban disposable e-cigarettes

Wildly popular with young people for their dizzying array of flavours, including apple, watermelon and cola, the time is up for disposable e-cigarettes in Belgium — the first EU country to ban them.

From January 1, it will be forbidden to sell single-use vapes in Belgium, a bid to protect young people's health as part of a national anti-tobacco plan.

The European Union aims to achieve a tobacco-free generation by 2040, reducing the 27-country bloc's smoking population from around 25 per cent now to less than five per cent of the total. Some EU countries plan to bring that deadline forward. Vapes are often promoted as less harmful than smoking traditional tobacco products.

They attract younger users with their colourful packaging, the promise of mouth-watering flavours, and the advantage of avoiding that nasty smoke smell on fingers.

But since e-cigarettes still contain nicotine, which is highly addictive, critics fear they could be a potential stepping stone to more traditional tobacco products.

"The problem is that young people start using vapes without always knowing their nicotine content, and nicotine is addictive," said Nora Melard, spokeswoman for the Alliance for a Tobacco-Free Society in Belgium.

"We have young people saying they wake up at night to take

a puff," she told AFP.

"It's very worrying." Belgium boasts it has reacted quickly to the dangers posed by disposable e-cigarettes, which hit the market more than five years ago.

In 2021, the federal government submitted a proposal to the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, to ban single-use vapes.

The commission, which must give its approval for any sales ban, accorded a green light to Belgium in March 2024, paving the way for a national law to enter into force.

France has obtained EU acceptance for a similar ban.

Once enacted, the French law will ban the production, sale and free offer of vapes, with a fine of 100,000 euros (\$104,000) for any violations.

### 'Ecological disaster'

An EU study in 2023 found the majority of e-cigarette users opted for a rechargeable vape but the single-use versions were popular with young people aged 15 to 24.

When seeking the EU's approval for its ban, Belgium argued that the plastic single-use vape with its lithium battery usually gets thrown away within five days of purchase.

By contrast, the rechargeable versions can last for around six or seven months.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1882026/belgium-becomes-first-eu-country-to-ban-disposable-e-cigarettes>

## New Zealand launches free vape scheme to help smokers quit smoking

A smokefree campaigner is backing the government's plan to use vaping starter kits to help adults quit smoking.

The government will supply vaping starter kits to stop-smoking services around the country to help adults quit.

Action for Smokefree 2025 director Ben Youdan said research showed vaping was an effective tool to help people get off cigarettes.

"There's absolutely no doubt that vaping is substantially less harmful than smoking cigarettes. "It's not completely harm-free, but if you're a smoker and you switch to vaping, you can massively reduce the risk of getting sick and risk of dying as a consequence of tobacco use."

The greater use of vaping starter kits is among the government's plans for a final push to achieve its Smokefree 2025 goal.

Associate Health Minister Casey Costello said clients

would receive a vape device and a month's supply of nicotine pods each month over three months, with continuing support from a stop-smoking service.

The kits would be free and available to adults who smoke, she said.

"We know that more people try and quit over Christmas and New Year and smoking cessation providers are getting more tools to help smokers quit," Costello said.

"Vaping has played a key role in reducing smoking rates and the government supports adults switching to vaping because vaping is far less harmful than smoking cigarettes.

"Those using quit-smoking services are four times more likely to successfully stop smoking compared to those who receive no support, and this initiative provides the services with another tool."



Costello said New Zealand needed to reinvigorate its stop smoking efforts and to target the right people, if the country was to get the smoking rate below 5 percent by the end of next year and achieve the Smokefree 2025 goals.

"We also want to ensure there's access to a range of effective products and tools - I'm hoping we can provide a new device to providers soon - and

that the whole health sector works together to encourage referrals to stop smoking providers," she said.

"Our message for 2025 is that it's always worth trying to quit smoking - that tens of thousands of others have managed to do it - and that there are great people ready to help."

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/537907/vaping-kits-to-be-made-free-for-smokers-to-help-them-quit>

## Single cigarette costs men 17, women 22 minutes of life, study warns

Researchers at University College London found that on average a single cigarette takes about 20 minutes off a person's life, meaning that a typical pack of 20 cigarettes can shorten a person's life by nearly seven hours.

According to the analysis, if a smoker on 10 cigarettes a day quits on 1 January, they could prevent the loss of a full day of life by 8 January. They could boost their life expectancy by a week if they quit until 5 February and a whole month if they stop until 5 August. By the end of the year, they could have avoided losing 50 days of life, the assessment found.

"People generally know that smoking is harmful but tend to underestimate just how much," said Dr Sarah Jackson, a principal research fellow at UCL's alcohol and tobacco research group. "On average, smokers who don't quit lose around a decade of life. That's 10 years of precious time, life moments, and milestones with loved ones."

Smoking causes about 80,000 deaths a year in the UK and a quarter of all cancer deaths in England.

The study, commissioned by the Department of Health, draws on the latest data from the British Doctors Study, which began in 1951 as one of the world's first large studies into the effects of smoking, and the Million Women Study, which has tracked women's health since 1996.

While an earlier assessment in the BMJ in 2000 found that on average a single cigarette reduced life expectancy by about 11 minutes, the latest analysis published in the Journal of Addiction nearly doubles the figure to 20 minutes – 17 minutes for men and 22 minutes for women.

"Some people might think they don't mind missing out on a few years of life, given that old age is often marked by chronic illness or disability. But smoking doesn't cut short the unhealthy period at the end of life," Jackson told the Guardian. "It primarily eats into the relatively healthy years in midlife, bringing forward the onset of ill-health. This means a 60-year-old smoker will typically have the health profile of a 70-year-old non-smoker."

The authors stress that smokers must quit completely to get the full benefits to health and life expectancy. Previous work has shown there is no safe level of smoking: the risk of heart disease and stroke is only about 50% lower for people who smoke one cigarette a day compared with those who smoke 20 a day. "Stopping smoking at every age is beneficial, but the sooner smokers get off this escalator of death the longer and healthier they can expect their lives to be," they write.

The Department of Health said smokers could find advice, support and resources on the NHS Quit Smoking app and the online Personal Quit Plan, which tailors its advice to individual's preferences.

Prof Sanjay Agrawal, a special adviser on tobacco at the Royal College of Physicians, said: "Every cigarette smoked costs precious minutes of life, and the cumulative impact is devastating, not only for individuals but also for our healthcare system and economy. This research is a powerful reminder of the urgent need to address cigarette smoking as the leading preventable cause of death and disease in the UK."

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/dec/30/single-cigarette-takes-20-minutes-off-life-expectancy-study>

## Milan prohibits all outdoor smoking in Italy's toughest ban to date

Smokers in Italy's financial and fashion capital of Milan risk being fined for lighting up on city streets or crowded public areas, after the country's toughest ban came into effect. Those who defy the new prohibition in the polluted northern Italian city could be fined between 40 and 240 euros (\$41 to \$249), a punishment that does not sit well with all residents. "I think this measure is excessive. As long as we are talking about an indoor place, I agree. because (smoking) can be bothersome and it is not healthy," sales clerk Myrian Illiano, 21, told AFP.

"But if we are talking about an open place, I don't see why one should be restricted." However, content creator Chiara Ciuffini, 39, was all in favour of the new move.

"I agree, because I am a sporty, non-smoking person. I hope smokers can also understand the need of nonsmokers who want to breathe cleaner air," she said.

Milan's air quality ordinance, passed in 2020 by the city council, called for progressively stricter bans on smoking. Starting in 2021, it was forbidden to smoke in parks and playgrounds, as well as bus stops and sports facilities. The latest smoking ban, effective January 1, applies to "all public spaces, including streets", with the exception of

"isolated places where it is possible to maintain a distance of at least 10 metres from other people", according to the text. Local officials say the measure is aimed at reducing airborne particulates to "improve the quality of the city's air, to protect the health of citizens, including protection from passive smoking in public places, also frequented by children", according to a statement.

Emanuele Marinoni, vice president of the Italian Tobacconists Federation and the owner of a tobacco shop in Milan, said he expects business to drop by "20 to 30 percent".

"When a person is in the office, (to smoke) they move to the balcony or to the street. It is obvious that there is bound to be a decrease in (cigarette) consumption," he said.

The ban -- which comes ahead of the Milan-Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics -- does not apply to e-cigarettes.

Situated in the middle of the industrial Po Valley and choked with road traffic, Milan is one of Europe's most polluted cities in terms of air. Cigarette smoke, "like all combustion, contributes to the creation of fine particles", said Anna Scavuzzo, Milan's deputy mayor.

<https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20250101-milan-smoking-italy-ban>

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 Global Action on Ending Smoking (GA), ARI established the Pakistan Alliance for Nicotine and Tobacco Harm Reduction (PANTHR) in 2019 to promote innovative solutions for smoking cessation.

To know more about us, please visit: [www.aripk.com](http://www.aripk.com) and [www.panthr.org](http://www.panthr.org)

Follow us on [www.facebook.com/ari.panthr/](https://www.facebook.com/ari.panthr/) | [https://twitter.com/ARI\\_PANTHR](https://twitter.com/ARI_PANTHR) | <https://instagram.com/ari.panthr>

Islamabad, Pakistan | Email: [info@aripk.com](mailto:info@aripk.com)