**Tobacco harm reduction, cessation services key to achieving a smoke-free Pakistan**

ISLAMABAD, 3 July, 2025: Pakistan must integrate tobacco harm reduction and affordable cessation services into its national tobacco control strategy to support adult smokers who are unable to quit through conventional means and to curb the widespread use of combustible tobacco products.

This call was made by the Alternative Research Initiative (ARI) and its partners, who emphasized the urgent need for evidence-based approaches that prioritize public health.

They stated that achieving a smoke-free Pakistan is within reach—provided current tobacco control efforts are diversified to include innovative and science-backed solutions. Despite two decades of progress, combustible smoking remains a leading health concern, with over 31 million tobacco users in the country, 17 million of whom are cigarette smokers. Alarmingly, fewer than 3% of adult smokers manage to quit each year due to inadequate cessation support services.

While reaffirming their support for existing government initiatives, ARI and its partners urged policymakers to examine emerging global evidence on the effectiveness of tobacco harm reduction.

The statement spotlighted Sweden as a case study: it is on track to become the world’s first “smoke-free” nation—defined as smoking among less than 5% of adults. By endorsing alternatives such as snus, nicotine pouches, and vapes, Sweden has slashed its smoking rate from 15% to 5.6% in just 15 years, ahead of the EU’s 2040 target.

To replicate such success, ARI called for ensuring the availability of affordable, accessible, and effective smoking cessation services. There is also a need for actively involving health professionals in making access to smoking cessation services easy. This should be backed by incorporating tobacco harm reduction into national policy frameworks. Critically, there is a need for sensibly implementing regulations for safer nicotine alternatives.

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