



Why assuming vaping is harmless is a fool's paradise

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If you look around Western Australia in 2023, vaping is absolutely everywhere.

Some are using it to quit smoking; some just vape; some vape and smoke – but regardless of its use, very little is known about the harmful effects of vaping.

Which is why I believe the TGA's request for public submissions into vaping regulations was well overdue.

This is a public health issue which must be reviewed with a sense of urgency.

E-cigarettes were intended to help adults quit smoking, but in reality that's only one of the many ways they're being used.

This is a sector of health that desperately needs reform. Vaping flavours and their marketing tactics appeal to teens and, whether we like it or not, there is already a thriving black market that skirts around 'prescription only' rules.

I agree wholeheartedly with the AMA and its 'vaping is not harmless, not safe' stance. We simply don't know enough about these products.

As a health insurance provider, we need to be advocating for better health, but as CEO of St Luke's Health, Paul Lupo recently said: "We need to set health policies to support good health – not health policies that support an industry to continue making money from addiction and terrible health outcomes."

Our goal should be advancing the end game for tobacco, just like St Luke's are pushing for in Tasmania.

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The Tasmanian Government recently launched the Tasmanian Tobacco Action Plan 2022-2026, which aims to put a formal review in place to end all sales of smoking products in the State.

The plan is to reduce the smoking of tobacco products, with the aim of eventually ending the commercial sale of cigarettes and tobacco by 2030.

It's a bold plan, but one I support and believe we should be following in Western Australia.

I disagree with Britain's NHS model, which supports vaping as a way for people to quit smoking.

According to the NHS, many thousands of people in the UK have stopped smoking with the help of an e-cigarette.

A 2021 NHS review found people who used e-cigarettes to quit smoking, combined with expert face-to-face support, were twice as likely to succeed as people who used other nicotine replacement products, such as patches or gum.

But they also admit that the long-term risks of vaping are not yet clear.

In fact, the only facts we know about vaping are that:

- there is insufficient evidence to promote the use of e-cigarettes for smoking cessation;
- there is increasing evidence of health harms;
- e-cigarettes may normalise the act of smoking and attract young people; and
- e-cigarettes should be more properly regulated.

The AMA is right to question whether doctors should be providing prescriptions for nicotine for vapes, and the question must also be asked by doctors: Is this really the only pathway to quitting for this patient?

It's clear to me that we need stricter regulations around nicotine vaping products (NVPs) because we know too little about their safety, quality and efficacy.

I'm happy to be proved wrong in 20 years' time when we have proper research on the real effects of vaping, but until then I'll maintain my stance that vaping is a fool's paradise and one the Australian government should not be supporting. ■