



# Vaping laws a victory, now it's time to ban smoking

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**W**orld-first vaping legislation introduced into Federal Parliament recently marked another public health landmark in the fight against vaping in our community. All vaping products, including liquids with or without nicotine, and hardware will be banned from importation with the enactment of the Therapeutic Goods and Other Legislation Amendment (Vaping Reforms) Bill 2024. This will leave vapers who want to use their devices with nicotine the option of obtaining a prescription from their GP and then buying nicotine vaping liquids from a pharmacy.

At the start of the year, a ban on the importation of disposable vapes was enforced. Border and customs officials have already seized a significant number of these devices, many destined to end up in the hands of our children, after being sold illegally under the convenience store counter or in schools across the country.

Health Minister Mark Butler should be applauded for enacting these laws in a timely and comprehensive manner.

While there are fears of a black market developing, these regulations enforced by the TGA and Australian Border Force were necessary to end the vaping epidemic among our young people that has developed over several years.

And already enforcement is bringing about results.

Recently, NSW authorities, with the Australian Federal Police, busted a vape-supply syndicate, seizing 213,000 devices, cash and tobacco valued at more than \$12 million.

Vapers and their supporters are unhappy with the new laws.

We must acknowledge that, for those who have become addicted to nicotine via vaping, further education and support will be needed to support their transition to the new regulatory framework. At the same time, we should be accelerating efforts to assist vapers to quit their habit with government-supported programs.

But as we applaud the action we've taken on vaping, it's time to also address the other nicotine addiction that is

killing 20,000 Australians every year. Smoking remains the leading cause of premature death in our country. One report from 2019 calculates that the deadly addiction costs the economy, in tangible and intangible terms, close to \$137 billion.

There is no safe level of exposure to tobacco smoke, yet we continue to make cigarettes and tobacco freely available for purchase to anyone over 18 – albeit at some of the world's highest prices. The current smoking rate in Australia is about 12 per cent, and the Federal

Government's National Tobacco Strategy aims to reduce that rate to under 10 per cent by 2025, and 5 per cent or less by 2030.

But we could do more. We could follow the lead of the UK, which has flagged a plan to phase out smoking by raising the minimum age for buying cigarettes – by one year, every year, until smoking is all but eliminated from society.

I admire the work of another Health Fund, St Lukes, in rallying with the State Government in Tasmania to provoke

change via the Tasmanian Government's 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 outcome should be to eventually end the commercial sale of cigarettes and tobacco by 2030.

Both the English and Tasmanian plans are bold initiatives which, if successfully implemented, would significantly accelerate the goal of a smoke-free society – and as such, are worthy of closer consideration by our federal health authorities.

What should inform all our decisions around tobacco policy must be the health of the remaining 3.5 million Australians who still smoke and vape. For them, the decision to quit vaping or smoking is only half the battle. For those who are already addicted, it's a hard road; one that is paved with obstacles. Obstacles which I believe, with the right support and encouragement, we can help them overcome. ■

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