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Cancer Council Australia and Quit warn plans to make cigarettes and vapes more accessible and affordable risks creating a new generation of nicotine addiction

Proposals to legalise vaping products and dramatically reduce tobacco excise would undermine decades of progress in reducing smoking and preventing cancer, warns Cancer Council Australia and Quit.

Australia has achieved the lowest smoking rates in living memory, with recent national Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2025 data showing daily smoking has continued a downward trend - falling to a historic low of 5.6% among those aged 14+.

Cancer Council Australia Director of Cancer Control Policy David Martin said this progress is a result of decades of world-leading public health policy aimed at reducing the burden of death and disease caused by smoking – progress now under threat by new proposals.

David Martin said: "Australia now has the lowest smoking rates we've ever seen. This is not the time to abandon the measures that have delivered those results. The overwhelming majority of cancers caused by smoking are preventable and every policy decision should be judged against one simple question: will it reduce nicotine addiction and smoking, or increase it?"

"Sixty-six people will die today from smoking. We should be asking how we further drive down smoking, not how we make cigarettes and nicotine products more available and socially acceptable."

Additionally, the proposed measures do little to tackle the illicit market. Mr Martin added: "We know that the illicit trade is a serious problem but making tobacco cheaper or creating a commercial vape market will not address it. The answer to illicit tobacco is stronger enforcement - tighter control of supply, better policing, tougher penalties and disrupting organised crime."

Cancer Council Australia and Quit said the debate had become increasingly distracted by arguments about tax revenue and illicit trade, rather than the public health purpose of tobacco control and preventing a new generation of nicotine addiction.

Quit Medical Lead, Dr Liam Egan agrees: "Quitline receives calls from young people addicted to vaping and pouches, and struggling to quit. We don't want to make these harmful, addictive nicotine products easier to access at the very moment we should be doing everything possible to prevent another generation becoming hooked. These proposals go against hard-fought public health wins."

Proposals to legalise and commercialise vaping products also risks driving smoking rates back up.

Chair of Cancer Council's Tobacco Issues Committee Alecia Brooks said: "We know that people who vape are five times as likely to go on to smoke tobacco products. At a time when smoking rates are

at historic lows, creating a legal retail market for vapes risks reversing years of progress. Public policy should be focused on reducing addiction, not shifting consumers between addictive products."

The recent AIHW NDSHS data also showed that current vaping among 18–24-year-olds has fallen considerably from 20.6% to 14%, while daily vaping remained stable across all age groups, marking a significant shift from the increasing trend observed in previous surveys.

Vapes are already available to people who are using them to quit smoking. Cancer Council Australia said Australians overwhelmingly support strong restrictions on tobacco and vaping products and want governments to focus on effective enforcement. More than 75% of Australians support legislation that prohibits sales of vapes outside pharmacies, and more than 80% support current controls on packaging and additives.

Ms Brooks added: "Australians are not calling for easier access to nicotine products. What they want is effective policing of organised crime, stronger enforcement against illicit operators and retailers, and proper implementation of existing laws."

Smoking remains the leading preventable cause of cancer in Australia and tobacco use is linked to at least 16 different types of cancer. The organisations warned against allowing tobacco industry interests to shape public policy over health outcomes.

Mr Martin added: "We should be deeply concerned whenever policies that expand access to addictive products align with the commercial interests of large tobacco companies.

"Recent parliamentary scrutiny has highlighted the influence industry actors continue to seek in public health debates. Policymakers must remain focused on independent evidence and health outcomes.

"Australia has made remarkable progress. We now have the lowest smoking rates in living memory. This is not the time to change direction. It is the time to stay the course and continue reducing smoking, vaping and nicotine addiction."

For support to quit nicotine, visit www.quit.org.au or call Quitline 13 7848.

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About Cancer Council Australia

Cancer Council Australia is Australia's leading cancer charity, working to reduce the impact of cancer for all Australians. Cancer Council Australia works with its members, the eight state and territory Cancer Councils to:

- Undertake and fund cancer research
- Prevent and control cancer
- Provide information and support for people affected by cancer
- Shape and influence policy and practice

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