

MEDIA RELEASE

Coalition policy gives tobacco companies a tax cut, risks fuelling nicotine addiction

The Australian Council on Smoking and Health (ACOSH) which includes Australia's major health organisations, is deeply concerned that the illicit tobacco crisis is being used as a justification to wind back decades of successful tobacco control measures, with the Coalition's proposed policies risking higher smoking rates and ultimately costing Australians far more than the price of a packet of cigarettes.

The Coalition has proposed cutting tobacco excise by 80 per cent and legalising commercial sales of vapes and pouches. ACOSH says these measures would not dismantle organised crime networks or close stores selling illicit tobacco and that there is no independent modelling or evidence to support the Coalition's policies.

"Slashing tobacco excise and expanding commercial vape sales will not stop criminal networks from importing, distributing and selling illicit products," said ACOSH CEO Laura Hunter.

"What we do know is making cigarettes cheaper will mean more smoking and fewer quit attempts, particularly among young people who are highly sensitive to price."

Ms Hunter said the illicit trade is driven by global mass production and sophisticated criminal supply chains. Governments can never price match organised crime that can make a pack of illicit tobacco for \$0.28.

ACOSH has consistently called for a multi-pronged response to the illicit tobacco crisis, including far stronger border controls, better-resourced enforcement, tougher penalties, nationally consistent retail licensing reforms to reduce the number of outlets, and free nicotine replacement therapy for people trying to quit.

They say one of the big opportunities is tightening the supply chains criminal networks are exploiting and becoming more restrictive about how this deadly product is imported and sold in Australia.

ACOSH supports licensing only businesses that can demonstrate strong security, governance and product traceability.

"We need a smaller, more compliant retail environment where enforcement is easier and illicit sales are harder. More than 60 per cent of shops subject to NSW closure orders for illicit tobacco are licensed to sell tobacco legally. That's not a licensing system doing its job."

ACOSH, along with organisations including the [Australian Medical Association](#), [Lung Foundation Australia](#), [Cancer Council Australia](#), [Quit](#), the [Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand](#), and the [Public Health Association Australia](#) also rejects calls for a commercial vape market, noting that adults can already access regulated therapeutic products for smoking cessation through pharmacies.



“The Cochrane review shows regulated nicotine vapes may help some smokers quit, but it does not support selling them through convenience stores, tobacconists or a commercial retail market.

“A retail vape market proposal asks parents, teachers and communities to accept greater youth exposure to nicotine so the industry can replace the customers it loses every year to quitting, disease, and death.”

ACOSH said the Coalition’s proposal risks adopting the story long promoted by the tobacco and nicotine industry.

“The idea that Australia’s challenge is simply ‘illegal’ tobacco and ‘illegal’ vapes is precisely the framing the tobacco industry wants policymakers to adopt. It is telling that there is nothing in these proposals that meaningfully address the needs of the 90 per cent of smokers who say they want to quit.”

“This crisis should be an opportunity to be bold. Australians need to decide what kind of future we want: one with more smoking, more nicotine addiction and vape stores back on every street corner. Or do we want to be bold and accelerate the end of Australia’s deadliest consumer product? We believe it’s time to say enough is enough.”

ENDS

For those looking to quit smoking or vaping, visit quit.org.au or call quit 13 78 48 for free confidential advice and support.

If you suspect illicit tobacco is being sold or distributed in your community, report it to the Australian Border Force via Border Watch at www.abf.gov.au/borderwatch or 1800 009 623.

ACOSH is an independent, not-for-profit coalition of health, education, community, social service and research organisations from across Australia that advocates for evidence-based regulatory and legislative changes to reduce the impact of smoking on the Australian community. ACOSH receives funding through Healthway and the Health Peak and Advisory Bodies Program.