WARNING.
CHEAPER CIGARETTES WILL KILL MORE AUSTRALIANS.

To Australia's Political Leaders,

We write as Australia's leading health peak bodies, alongside doctors, nurses and community advocates. We are all deeply concerned about policies to make cigarettes cheaper and open the door to widespread commercial vape sales. This will kill more Australians.

Australia has been winning the long fight to bring down tobacco and nicotine addiction, with daily smoking rates down to 5.6% in 2025, and daily vaping use stabilising at 3.6%[1]. By contrast, in the UK[2] and New Zealand[3], where vapes are sold more freely, vaping rates are much higher.

Australia has a serious illicit tobacco and nicotine problem. It is fuelling organised crime, harming communities and placing real pressure on police, border officials and regulators.

Canada cut the excise to address the illicit market: illicit trade continued, smoking increased and the policy contributed to more than 30,000 excess tobacco-related deaths[4]. **Slashing the tobacco excise and weakening vape laws will only make smoking and vaping rates go up, leading to more deaths, more years of disease and increased healthcare costs.**

The illicit trade was not caused by tobacco-control policies. It has flourished because organised crime has access to a global oversupply of cheap tobacco—reportedly manufactured for less than a dollar a pack[5]. There are 40,000 shops selling legal tobacco in Australia, compared to 9,500 supermarkets. **We have allowed far too many tobacco retailers to operate alongside weak regulation and poor enforcement.** This has allowed illicit sellers to take root street by street and suburb by suburb for too long. Criminal groups saw a low-risk, high-profit market and moved in. Making cigarettes cheaper and vapes available everywhere will not change that.

The influence of tobacco companies in current Australian politics is abundantly clear, including being allowed to give evidence in secret while health and community groups speak openly. If the tobacco excise is slashed and strong vaping laws abandoned, tobacco companies will sell more cigarettes and bring their vapes to Australia to hook the next generation on nicotine.

Australia has spent decades driving down smoking rates. Higher tobacco taxes, plain packaging, strong public health laws and motivational quit smoking campaigns have all saved lives. We shouldn't throw that away because criminals exploited a gap in enforcement and tobacco companies now see an opportunity for more profit.

The answer is clear: stronger border controls, a higher standard for those licensed to sell tobacco, a reduction in the number of stores and consistent penalties across the country, backed by well-funded enforcement.

The community wants more action to stop tobacco and vape use, not a winding back of proven measures which protect the health of all Australians. Selling cigarettes is a dying business.

We must also tackle the ongoing demand for all tobacco and nicotine products by making it easier to quit. That means free nicotine replacement therapy to increase access to practical support for the 95% of smokers who are open to quitting, a commitment to a tobacco and nicotine-free generation and a renewed investment to support hard-hitting public health campaigns on the harms of all tobacco use

All tobacco consumed — taxed or illicit — kills 66 Australians every day.

For support to quit nicotine, visit www.quit.org.au or call Quitline on 13 78 48

[1] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2026, August 20). 'NDSHS 2025: Tobacco, e-cigarettes and other nicotine insights'. https://www.aihw.gov.au/
[2] Office for National Statistics. (2025, November 4). 'Adult smoking habits in the UK: 2024'. https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandlifeexpectancies/bulletins/adultsmokinghabitsingreatbritain/2024
[3] Ministry of Health. (2025, November 19). 'Trends in smoking and vaping: New Zealand Health Survey 2024/25'. https://www.health.govt.nz/monitoring-statistics/surveys/new-zealand-health-survey/publications/202425-survey-publications/trends-in-smoking-and-vaping
[4] Jha, P., Lewington, S., & Banks, E. (2026). 'The need for a balanced perspective on tobacco cessation and taxation'. *Addiction.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1111/add.70566
[5] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2026). 'Transnational organized crime threat assessment: South-East Asia 2026'. UNODC Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific. https://www.unodc.org/roseap/uploads/documents/Publications/2026/TOCTA_South-East_Asia_2026.pdf

DON'T LET ORGANISED CRIME AND BIG TOBACCO REWRITE AUSTRALIA'S HEALTH POLICY.

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