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Funding vape kits helps smokers quit and saves lives – Jonathan Devery

Opinion by
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Jonathan Devery is the chair of the Vaping Industry Association of New Zealand (Vianz).

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Science shows vaping cuts smoking harm, not public health standards. Photo / Getty Images

THE FACTS

- **Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora's provision of vape starter kits is funding harm reduction, not addiction, the author argues.**
- **Vaping is significantly less harmful than smoking, with evidence showing it's effective in helping smokers quit.**
- **New Zealand's strict vaping regulations ensure quality, steering smokers away from unsafe, unregulated products.**

When Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora gives vape starter kits to smokers, it's not "funding addiction". It's funding harm reduction – one of the most effective public health strategies we've ever had.

A recent editorial suggested taxpayers were bankrolling a "less-bad addiction" while boosting "supplier credibility".

That... completely misses the point. Every smoker who switches to vaping dramatically cuts their risk of serious illness and premature death. This isn't about morals – it's about evidence.

No one credible claims vaping is harmless. It doesn't need to be. What matters is that it's far less harmful than smoking – and the science on that is clear.

The Royal College of Physicians found vaping to be at least 95% less harmful than smoking. Public Health England and the UK's Office for Health Improvement and Disparities reaffirmed that just a few years ago.

A recent [Cochrane Review](#) – the gold standard for medical evidence – concluded that people using nicotine vapes are twice as likely to quit smoking as those using patches or gum.

Backing that up, a University of New South Wales trial using a New Zealand vaping product found it was three times more effective than nicotine replacement therapy in helping disadvantaged smokers quit.

Ignoring that consensus is like saying we shouldn't wear seatbelts because they sometimes cause bruises.

The [editorial](#) also pointed to a small 2022 study to suggest vaping "doesn't work". Yet even that study found nearly 70% of participants quit smoking tobacco altogether – and that's the number that really matters. Yes, some continued to use nicotine. But they were no longer inhaling tar, carbon monoxide or thousands of combustion toxins. That's not failure – that's massive progress.

The problems people point to – like heavy metals or dodgy flavourings – come from black-market products, not the regulated ones available through legitimate New Zealand retailers. [Our vaping regulations are some of the toughest in the world](#), with strict limits on nicotine, ingredient disclosure, child safety standards and an approved flavour list. Health NZ's decision to procure from licensed, compliant suppliers ensures quality and consistency – and helps steer smokers away from unsafe, unregulated products.

Public funding for harm reduction isn't radical – it's just smart. We fund methadone programmes and needle exchanges because they save lives and reduce long-term health costs. The same logic applies here. [Smoking still kills over 4000 New Zealanders every year](#) and costs billions in preventable health spending. Helping smokers switch to vaping isn't an endorsement of nicotine; it's a step towards quitting altogether.

It's fair to have a debate about [how quit programmes are run](#). But it's not fair – or helpful – to undermine harm reduction with cherry-picked stats and moral outrage. When public debate ignores decades of international research, it risks confusing the very people who need support to quit. That doesn't protect the public – it protects cigarettes.

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- ['Unexpected and interesting': What vaping does to your ...](#)
- [Vapes containing dangerous 'space oil' found in NZ](#)
- [Vaping epidemic: One in five secondary students addicted ...](#)

New Zealand has [led the world in tobacco control](#) before. We can keep that leadership, but only if we let science, not ideology, guide our decisions.

Every day, thousands of smokers are choosing a safer alternative. They deserve support – not scorn.

Because if we keep attacking harm reduction, we're not fighting addiction anymore.

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