



**NO FIRE, NO SMOKE  
GLOBAL STATE OF TOBACCO  
HARM REDUCTION**

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**2018**

# Executive Summary





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## No Fire, No Smoke: The Global State of Tobacco Harm Reduction 2018

**The GSTHR report** maps for the first time the global, regional and national availability and use of safer nicotine products, the regulatory responses to these products, and the public health potential of tobacco harm reduction.

Every six seconds someone dies from a smoking-related disease and the problem is likely to worsen; the steep smoking declines in richer countries are slowing while in poorer countries smoking is set to rise. Existing forms of tobacco control are proving insufficient. While many people give up smoking, on their own or with medicinal products, many fail. 'Quit or die' is no longer the only option for those who cannot give up. Safer nicotine products offer another way. There is substantial international, independent evidence that these products are demonstrably safer than cigarettes. These potential lifesaving products could lead to a global revolution in public health.

### The global smoking epidemic

- » More people smoke cigarettes than use any other form of combustible tobacco products
- » The tobacco cigarette is the most dangerous way of consuming nicotine
- » The combustion of tobacco is the problem - combustion releases highly dangerous toxins
- » People smoke for the nicotine but die from the tar and gases
- » Smoking is a major contributor to deaths from non-communicable diseases
- » It is the poor who suffer most from smoking and the poorest countries are least able to enforce effective tobacco controls
- » Many people give up smoking on their own and some with the help of medicinal products, but many fail

- » The steep declines in smoking prevalence in higher income countries are beginning to slow while in many poorer countries smoking is set to rise
- » Existing forms of tobacco control are not enough to help people shift away from smoking tobacco

## Safer nicotine products and tobacco harm reduction

- » Safer Nicotine Products (SNP) deliver nicotine with a significant reduction in risk as compared to combusted tobacco products - there is 'No Fire, No Smoke'
- » International evidence shows that these products are safer for the individual smoker, immediate family and bystanders than smoking cigarettes
- » The provision of safer ways of delivering nicotine enables people to continue using nicotine but to avoid the health risks of smoking
- » 'Quit or Die' is no longer the only option for those who cannot give up nicotine. SNP - including e-cigarettes, heat-not-burn products and Swedish snus offer another way - 'Quit or Try'
- » The rapid rise in the use of SNP has been driven by consumer demand often in the face of public health or government opposition
- » Flawed science, misleading public information and sensational media reporting are all sowing seeds of doubt about SNP among consumers, politicians and the general public
- » Banning these products, or subjecting them to onerous regulation or high taxation effectively deny access to potentially lifesaving products
- » SNP could not only effect a global revolution in public health but also at no cost to governments

## Key figures

### Smoking

- » Every six seconds a person dies from a smoking-related disease
  - » Half of all those who smoke will die prematurely from a smoking-related disease
  - » Over six million people die from a smoking-related disease every year
  - » More people die from smoking cigarettes than from malaria, HIV and tuberculosis combined
  - » The WHO estimates that by the end of the century one billion people will have suffered a smoking-related disease
  - » The global cost of smoking-related diseases in terms of health care and lost productivity is estimated by the WHO at USD \$1 trillion annually
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## Safer nicotine products

- » E-cigarettes are estimated to be 95% safer than smoking cigarettes
- » Snus is not inhaled, so there is no risk of respiratory disease which accounts for nearly half of all smoking-related deaths; and no risk to bystanders. There is no significant association with premature deaths, diabetes, pancreatic and oral cancers, heart disease or strokes
- » It is estimated that by 2021, over 55 million people will be using e-cigarettes or heat-not-burn tobacco products and that the global market will be worth USD \$35 billion
- » Use of heat-not-burn products in Japan has seen cigarette sales fall by 27% in two years, an unprecedented national decrease in smoking
- » In Sweden snus has been instrumental in reducing smoking related mortality to the lowest in the EU
- » If the EU ban on snus is lifted, then around 320,000 premature deaths a year could be prevented in the EU
- » As Norwegian smokers switch to snus, the smoking rate among young Norwegian women has dropped to a world record of 1%
- » Over 50% of the UK's 3 million e-cigarette users are ex-smokers
- » 39 countries have inappropriately banned SNP including countries whose smoking prevalence is predicted to rise
- » 62 countries regulate e-cigarettes under tobacco legislation.

## The report - key themes

**The GSTHR report is founded on the principle of harm reduction.** Harm reduction refers to policies, regulations and actions focussed on reducing health risks, usually by providing safer forms of hazardous products or encouraging less risky behaviours, rather than simply banning products or behaviours. Harm reduction is a proven public health strategy.

**How does tobacco harm reduction work in practice?** It works through the provision of SNP allowing people to be able to consume nicotine without also inhaling the cancer-producing chemicals found in cigarette smoke. New products include e-cigarettes which first appeared in the mid-2000s. More recently, heat-not-burn devices have been developed that work by heating tobacco below the level of combustion sufficient to release the nicotine but with significantly reduced levels of toxins. Smokeless Swedish snus has been around for about 200 years but has enjoyed a renaissance in the light of the evidence that it makes a significant contribution to tobacco harm reduction.

**SNP and health.** Independent national scientific, clinical and parliamentary reviews have concluded that:

- » There are no circumstances in which it is safer to smoke than to use SNP
- » There is a continuum of risk, with cigarettes the highest and non-combustible products the lowest risk
- » People who switch from smoking to vaping can experience an improvement in health
- » Switching to vaping can help people quit smoking
- » There are currently no known long-term adverse health effects of vaping or snus
- » While young people will experiment with e-cigarettes, there is no evidence that this leads to regular cigarette smoking. Smoking rates among young people are falling.
- » There is no evidence for adverse effects from passive vaping - hence no risk to bystanders
- » There are no known short or long term adverse effects from using nicotine meaning that being 'dependent' on nicotine of itself is not a health risk

**Harm reduction is more than just health and safety - there is an important human rights aspect.** The preamble to the World Health Organization

Constitution 1946 states that *"The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition"*. This includes smokers and their right to information, services and products that may assist them to achieve that objective.

Smokers should not be denied access to harm reduction products that will help them avoid disease and early death from smoking. This is recognised in the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control 2005 which states that harm reduction is one of the defining strategies of tobacco control: *"A range of supply, demand and harm reduction strategies that aim to improve the health of a population by eliminating or reducing their consumption of tobacco products and exposure to tobacco smoke"*.

**Consumers of SNP.** In only a few years there has been rapid uptake in the use of the newer SNP in many countries while in both Sweden and Norway snus has replaced smoking over a relatively short space of time. In Japan the uptake of heat-not-burn products has seen the biggest ever drop in cigarette sales. This indicates an appetite for SNP such that where they are available - and if they are attractive and suitable alternatives to smoking - many smokers will choose them over smoking.

A key question is whether use of SNP drives down smoking and improves public health. The strongest evidence so far comes from Sweden where the uptake of snus and the decline in smoking has given this country the lowest smoking related mortality in Europe.

The uptake of SNP has mostly occurred in the absence of government, tobacco control and public health endorsement. It has been the ordinary consumers whose interest in SNP has driven this and who have been active in offering help and advice to those who wish to switch from smoking.

**Regulation and control.** The advent of new SNP presents challenges to tobacco control regimes at both a national and international level. A consumer can vape nicotine reasonably freely in the USA, UK and New Zealand, but faces fines or imprisonment in Thailand and Australia.

Legislators and politicians are no less immune than health professionals or ordinary consumers to being confused by contradictory research findings or influenced by the work of anti-harm reduction organisations and sensationalised media reporting.

To use the law to deny or inhibit access to SNP denies the robust and independent evidence base, and paradoxically perpetuates use of cigarettes (which are freely available the world over) and ensures continuing profits for tobacco companies.

Appropriate regulation should ensure consumer safety and confidence, encourage product innovation, and favour use of SNP over cigarettes.

## The harm reduction vision

It is imperative to keep eyes on the prize - an end to smoking - and not allow over-proscriptive regulation and control to deny access to safer products. SNP have the potential to be one of the most dramatic public health coups of modern times. While most global public health interventions come at great financial cost, this strategy costs governments, international agencies and NGOs nothing.

## **No Fire, No Smoke: The Global State of Tobacco Harm Reduction 2018**

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