

Dear Rt. Hon. Bob Blackman,

I am contacting you as you are the contact for APPG Smoking and Health. There have been worrying sudden changes in government policy, primarily related to vaping and talk of taxes and bans on a vastly safer product, vaping, that has been successfully displacing smoking.

Please see my previous [letter to APPG vaping](#) on why the disposable ban is likely to backfire; simply put, it will hand the entire market to illicit sales (these are already a problem, with oversized and higher-than-legal nicotine content). Illegal sales will likely increase sales to youth since they are already ignoring the law, and the situation in Australia with more than 50 fire bombings and three murders so far in the 'Nicotine turf wars' might be repeated here.

As per my letter above, the best way to deal with illegal disposables is to have the legal market out-compete them; at least shops and retailers have fixed premises, and trading standards can take action if they don't follow the law. It is much harder to police some bloke at the pub or other informal sales. You also lose out on VAT charged on legal sales.

Whatever you think about vaping, it saved my life; I started 16 years ago, very early when it was a new thing, and since then, there has been a vast amount of science (some good, some sadly terrible). Last week, 51 peer-reviewed papers and over 8,000 total papers were published. By now, vaping/nicotine is likely the most studied consumer drug ever. I had an MRI 15 years vaping (stopping smoking) of my head and upper torso. The doctors were able to confirm all the smoking damage had healed, and on explicitly asking if they could see any sign I vape, they could not (despite having found previously healed fractured ribs). Such experiences are not uncommon. A list of links to [approximately 100,000 people reporting in their own words](#) how vaping helped them.

Tobacco control has a problem; please do not let that upset the government's plans to help people stop smoking with the best available harm-reduced product to date. The NHS finds it 2/3 (66%) effective, far better than NRT at around 15% with the same support (easily found on their vaping to stop smoking web page).

Please ensure that the UK policy isn't derailed by click bait media, or the following:

Extract from Clive Bates (former director ASH) essay: [Tobacco Control's Nervous Breakdown](#)

Fourth, the existential threat to the tobacco control complex. The public discussion of the emerging landscape of low-risk consumer products seldom focuses on the interest group that is most vulnerable to disruption: the mainstream of tobacco control. It is a complex of interests comprising nonprofit activists, academics, medical and health societies, major institutions (such as the World Health Organization or the U.S. Food and Drug Administration), philanthropists and research-funding bodies. The problem for the mainstream of tobacco control is that without serious harm, the whole movement loses its purpose and its reason to exist. When it comes to low-risk alternatives to smoking, this complex is profoundly confronted by the threat of having nothing to control, no case for intervention and no reason to be. It is a powerful incumbent interest group challenged by new technology, new suppliers and new consumer confidence.

As a result, the mainstream of this interest group has rejected tobacco harm reduction as a strategy for addressing its own notional goals of reducing death and disease from tobacco use. Instead, it has mounted a rear-guard defense based on a range of strategies, including the following:

- Falsely implying that noncombustible products are no less risky than cigarettes, that data is too uncertain or short-term, or asserting that reduced risk is no more than a marketing claim of tobacco companies.
- Asserting that harm reduction is merely a commercial strategy of tobacco companies. The aim here is to attach the reputational baggage of “Big Tobacco” to these new developments. Yet, many independent experts support tobacco harm reduction, and it is good if tobacco companies adopt a business model aligned with reducing health impacts.
- Excluding or stigmatizing contrarian opinions and creating sealed bubbles open to groupthink. The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control has taken this to new extremes.
- Shifting emphasis to problematize nicotine rather than the “tar” of cigarette smoke that is the cause of nearly all tobacco-related disease. We are hearing more about “addiction” and less about cancer. Yet, a dependence only meets the definition of addiction if there is serious net harm to the user.
- A relentless focus on the supposed interests of children without recognizing that would-be smokers among adolescents also benefit from low-risk products and that the demand for nicotine has persisted across generations for hundreds of years. Young people have an interest in the health of the significant adults in their lives as carers, breadwinners and role models.
- Pressing for prohibitions or equivalent regulation to cigarettes, often with manipulation of language to imply equivalent risk, for example, by stating that heated-tobacco products produce

“smoke” or that all tobacco products should be treated the same even though they have very different risks.

- A blunt refusal to face trade-offs (for example, between the interests of youth and adults) or unintended consequences (for example, increases in smoking) arising from favored policy positions.

I have watched on in horror as the leadership in tobacco control, albeit with many honorable exceptions, has dogmatically denied and suppressed the opportunity to radically reshape the recreational nicotine market to cause vastly reduced harm and avoid hundreds of millions of premature deaths. It looks like a nervous breakdown is developing in tobacco control in response to profound disruptive innovation. I doubt they will survive it.

See also my [Letter PM 16th Feb 2024](#) particularly the graph that shows frequent youth use is not increasing, trials and infrequent use have, for perspective however, vaping has been far less popular and less harmful than youth drinking.

Please do what you can to ensure legislation is well thought out, measured and does not result in people being forced back to deadly smoking.  
Thank you for your time and urgent attention!  
Sincerely

Richard Pruen.