

# Experts urge Centre to reverse stand on e-cigarettes

Ask it to allow products that reduce the initiation into and continuous use of tobacco products

**BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN**  
NEW DELHI

Experts have called on the Union Health Ministry to reverse its stand on electronic cigarettes and help lower tobacco risk and abuse.

“The Union Health Ministry has adopted a policy on vaping that will harm the health of millions of Indians and protect and entrench smoking,” said former president of the International Harm Reduction Association Alex Wodak. He added that countries that aim to eradicate tobacco use usually get terrible results. It is much more effective to try and reduce the initiation and continuing use of tobacco products as well as encouraging less risky options.

Advocating for allowing vaping to be allowed in In-

**India risks missing a historic opportunity to reduce the harm caused by smoking tobacco. The country should consider the available evidence and take measures to endorse and regulate safer alternatives. Millions of lives could be saved**

KONSTANTINOS FARSALINOS  
MD, research fellow at the National School of Public Health, Athens

dia, experts say that most countries around the world allow vape products.

“Countries generally welcome safer products that have a potential to save lives,” said Professor David Sweanor, chair of the advisory board at the Centre for Health Law, Policy and Ethics, University of Ottawa, Canada.

He explained that Canada was among the countries that initially tried to ban vaping products, based on the science, recently had changed its stance to actively encouraging smokers to switch.

## Preventable deaths

“We have seen the same in fellow Commonwealth Country New Zealand. We have an opportunity to achieve a public health and consumer rights’ breakthrough of historic proportions, and governments should seize the opportunity. Twenty thousand people die each day due to disease caused by inhaling cigarette smoke. These premature deaths are preventable, but the cure needs to come from political action,” he added.

Experts have urged the India government to legalise and regulate safer alternatives to the tobacco products currently available in India.

“India risks missing a historic opportunity to reduce the harm caused by smoking

## TOBACCO KILLS UP TO HALF OF ITS USERS

Tobacco kills more than **7 million** people every year. More than **6 million** of those deaths are the result of direct tobacco use while around **890,000** people die because of exposure to second-hand smoke

Around **80%** of the world's 1.1 billion smokers live in low and middle-income countries

**FOR A SAFER ALTERNATIVE**

Vaping is the act of inhaling vapour produced by a vapouriser or electronic cigarette. The vapour is produced from materials such as e-liquids, concentrates, or dry herbs

## WHAT IS A VAPOURISER?

A vapouriser is an electric device that turns vaping material into vapour. A vapouriser usually consists of battery, main console or housing, cartridges, and atomiser or cartomiser. The battery generates the power for the heating element in the atomiser or cartomiser, which contacts the vaping material and transforms it into vapour for inhalation

## WHAT MATERIALS CAN BE VAPED?

The vast majority of vapers use e-liquids; other common materials include waxy concentrates and dry herbs. Different vapourisers support the vaping of different materials. For example, e-liquid vapourisers have a cartridge or tank, while a dry herb vapouriser has a heating chamber. Multipurpose vaporizers allow you to vape different materials simply by switching cartridges

tobacco. The country should consider the available evidence and take measures to endorse and regulate safer alternatives. E-cigarettes and safer alternatives to India's high-risk tobacco options should be made legal and appropriately regulated in India. Millions of lives could be saved,” said Konstantinos Farsalinos, MD, research fellow at the National School of Public Health, Athens.

Experts presenting their case to the India government said, “Nicotine, while addictive, is not particularly harmful. Burning tobacco, not nicotine, is why smoking harms smokers and public

health. E-cigarettes and other ‘vaping’ products eliminate combustion and provide nicotine in a much cleaner form.”

In 2014, Dr. Farsalinos and co-author Professor Riccardo Polosa published a systematic review of the evidence on e-cigarettes.

## Smoking cessation

“We found they are much safer than cigarette smoking. The evidence since then has convincingly confirmed this.”

Professor Rajesh Sharan, Department of Biochemistry and director of Design Innovation Centre at North-East-

ern Hill University, Shillong among the few experts in India who have studied e-cigarette science said, “In 2016 we encouraged the then Union Health and Family Welfare Minister to consider policies that would facilitate smoking cessation by providing smokers with safe and regulated tobacco alternatives. We believed then, and believe more strongly now, that public health in India is at a greater risk under a prohibitive environment than by allowing smokers, who wish to cease tobacco use, an alternative option based on nicotine replacement via e-cigarettes.”