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Opposition to Government funding of certain smoking cessation products

General Practitioners Aotearoa opposes the Government's recent decision to fund specific smoking cessation products, namely vaping kits.

As New Zealand's only independent organisation representing general practitioners, General Practitioners Aotearoa (GPA) is committed to keeping an open mind and supporting evidence-based strategies to reduce smoking prevalence and improve public health.

We are very concerned that the Government is funding these products without robust scientific validation of their efficacy at helping people stop smoking.

[The Ministry of Health's 2021 Guidelines for Helping People Stop Smoking](#) emphasise the importance of behavioural support and medicines with proven effectiveness.

Lack of scientific evidence

Recent evaluations of vaping products have not shown any significant efficacy in helping people stop smoking.

For instance, [a study assessing a "vape to quit" initiative](#) reported that it had only limited success. Only 16% of participants were both smokefree and vapefree after the programme.

A third of participants gave up smoking for vapes, but most participants were still smoking at the end of the programme.

The report says nicotine-containing e-cigarettes were "popular in all cohorts", which may indicate part of the problem: 22% of study participants were dual users at the end of the programme, still smoking and vaping as well.

Health risks associated with vaping

Emerging evidence indicates that vaping poses significant health risks, including lung damage and potential links to lung cancer.

Research has demonstrated that vaping, even without nicotine, can have immediate negative effects on lung function. A recent study found that vaping reduces oxygen intake, similar to the effects of smoking tobacco.

While long-term studies are ongoing, concerns have been raised about the potential link between vaping and lung cancer. Vaping exposes users to known cancer-causing chemicals, and research suggests that smoking or vaping nicotine can increase lung cancer risk.

Concerns regarding policy development

We are particularly troubled by reports suggesting that Associate Health Minister Casey Costello has adopted positions aligning with tobacco industry interests.

Documents indicate that proposals to freeze tobacco excise taxes originated from her office

We are concerned that tobacco industry-friendly perspectives are having a say on public health policy. This sort of influence should stay in the 1950s where it belongs.

Furthermore, the Chief Ombudsman has criticised Minister Costello for withholding documents related to tobacco policy. Without transparency, we have little faith in the decision-making processes.

Policy prescriptions

We urge the government to:

1. Reassess funding decisions: Ensure that all funded smoking cessation products are supported by rigorous scientific evidence demonstrating their effectiveness.
2. Maintain transparency: Adhere to transparent policy development processes, free from potential conflicts of interest or undue influence from industry stakeholders.
3. Engage healthcare professionals: Consult with medical experts and front-line healthcare providers in the formulation of public health strategies to combat smoking.

Our commitment remains steadfast in advocating for public health policies grounded in scientific evidence, transparency, and the best interests of the communities we serve.

ENDS

Contact for comment

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We may also be able to connect you with our members who wish to comment on relevant stories – email communications@gpaotearoa.co.nz for more information.

About General Practitioners Aotearoa

General Practitioners Aotearoa (GPA) is the only independent organisation exclusively representing the voices of doctors working in general practice. We represent GPs who are clinic owners, employees, contractors and trainees. We are member-funded and receive no government money. GPA formed after the demise of the New Zealand Medical Association to independently advocate for GPs. gpaotearoa.co.nz