



**CENTRO DI RICERCA PER LA RIDUZIONE DEL DANNO DA FUMO**  
**CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FOR THE ACCELERATION OF HARM REDUCTION**  
**COEHAR**



UNIVERSITÀ  
degli STUDI  
di CATANIA

To Mr. Rodrigo Roa Duterte  
President of The Philippines

Date: 12<sup>th</sup> January 2022

Dear President Duterte,

As a group of health professional leaders and academics with an interest in tobacco harm reduction, we are writing to express our full support for the VNP bill that both Houses of Congress have passed on Third Reading and which, I understand, will be submitted to your good office for your signature. We applaud Filipino policy makers and its President for taking the step of risk-proportionate regulation of tobacco products.

Harm reduction in the context tobacco control is a key instrument for disease prevention. There are preventable cancer and cardiopulmonary deaths, due to the underutilization of tobacco harm reduction strategies. This fact is also recognized in the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, Article 1(d).

In our studies on this subject, we found consistent improvements in respiratory symptoms, exercise tolerance, quality of life, and rate of disease exacerbations in patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases who abstained from smoking or substantially reduced their cigarette consumption by switching to e-cigarettes (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33101622/>) or heated tobacco product use (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33754228/>). Both of these product categories are non-combustible and a significant step away from the harm that comes from cigarettes.

Further, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in recent years authorized both e-cigarette products as well as heated tobacco products as “appropriate for the protection of public health.” The U.S. FDA review considered the risks and benefits to the population. This includes how the products may impact youth use of nicotine and tobacco, and the potential for the products to completely move adult smokers away from use of combustible cigarettes.

Some have raised concerns about the impact of these products on youth. However, this is precisely the reason why these products need to be regulated – to maximize the opportunity for adult smokers to move away from combustible tobacco use and to minimize the risks to youth.

There are also concerns that these products serve as a gateway to smoking or to illegal drugs. The experience in countries where these products have been made widely available by governments with appropriate regulations shows a sharp decline in smoking prevalence and no effect on illegal drug use suggesting that vapor products and heated tobacco products are *a way out of and not into smoking*.



As 15 past presidents of the Society for Research on Nicotine and Tobacco noted in their recent commentary (<https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/full/10.2105/AJPH.2021.306416>), “many scientists have concluded that vaping is likely substantially less dangerous than smoking” and that “the totality of the evidence indicates that frequent vaping increases adult smoking cessation.” On the risks to youth, this preeminent group of scientists stated that:

- The large majority of nontobacco product–using young people do not vape and, thus, have no nicotine exposure.
- Among those who vape, most do so infrequently; many are short-term experimenters.
- Frequent vaping is most common among current or former smokers, individuals already exposed to nicotine.
- The most dangerous form of youth exposure to nicotine, cigarette smoking, has declined at an unprecedented rate during the era of youth vaping. Use of other tobacco products has declined as well.

They concluded that “while evidence suggests that vaping is currently increasing smoking cessation, the impact could be much larger if the public health community paid serious attention to vaping’s potential to help adult smokers, smokers received accurate information about the relative risks of vaping and smoking, and policies were designed with the potential effects on smokers in mind.”

Therefore, the VNP bill is a step in the right direction. With this law, the Philippines will join the ranks of the UK, New Zealand, and other countries that have included tobacco harm reduction as part of their state policy. As for the above-mentioned countries, the VPN bill is expected to accelerate the decline in smoking prevalence in the Philippines too. This is a tremendous public health opportunity for the Philippines. We fully support the passage of the VNP bill into law.

Your sincerely,  
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