



Under the 'Swap to Stop' scheme one million people who smoke in England will be given a free vaping starter kit.

You have probably heard the recent news from overseas that the UK Government is launching a program to encourage people who smoke to switch to vaping. Under the 'Swap to Stop' scheme one million people who smoke in England will be given a free vaping starter kit. This is despite increasing concerns in the UK about the number of teenagers and young people taking up vaping. The UK Government's approach is in stark contrast to that of Australia and many other countries, where the use of vapes are generally discouraged and [even greater regulation on their accessibility](#) is being discussed. The Australian [Health Minister Mark Butler](#) recently said, "The tobacco industry has found a new way to develop a generation of nicotine addicts, and we will not stand for it."

So why have the UK taken this route which they say is grounded in evidence? NBPU TIS thought we should take a look at the evidence the UK based its decision on ([The Khan Review 2022](#)) to make sure we are not missing any new and emerging evidence which supports the effectiveness of 'vaping for quitting'.



The Khan Review said:

'In cigarettes, we know that it is not the nicotine that kills you but the other thousands of toxic chemicals such as tar and carbon monoxide.' (p.36)

We say:

Yes, carbon monoxide and tar are the big killers in tobacco smoking. But that doesn't mean nicotine is an innocent bystander to health harms. Nicotine raises blood pressure and heart rate and contributes to narrowing of the arteries and the heart disease experienced by people who smoke. Nicotine is also the addictive component that hooks you and keeps you coming back for more. We also know [vaping leads to tobacco use](#).

'Vapes give smokers the nicotine they crave but protect them from the toxins they would inhale from a cigarette.' (p.36)

Vaping is not a protection from inhaling toxins. Vapes contain many toxic chemicals including some linked to cancer. Many of these are also in cigarette smoke. Promoting the 'clean' nicotine provided in nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) is the best way to give people who smoke the nicotine they crave whilst protecting them from toxins.

'Given vapes have only been around for about a decade, we do not yet have the longitudinal studies to show long term effects. However, [the research](#) we do have is clear that they are at least 50% and probably closer to 95% less harmful than a cigarette. So, with careful reflection, I believe we must not let the pursuit of perfection become the enemy of the good.' (p.36)

We really don't yet have enough information to calculate what the extent of harm is for vapes in comparison to cigarettes. The figures presented in the Khan review are somewhat misleading since:

- The paper cited here initially estimated the overall harm to health of vaping to be 33% that of smoking (not 50%). Then in September 2022 the authors published [a correction](#) which retracted this estimate, stating that 'it seems premature to develop quantitative estimates of the relative harm to health from using modern ENDS (vaping) compared to tobacco smoking.'
- The 95% figure quoted here is based on opinion NOT research.

The best information we have about the harms of vaping comes from the recent [ANU review](#), which found the impact of vaping on 'many important health outcomes are uncertain', but 'several adverse health outcomes are higher in e-cigarette users.'

Vapes contain many toxic chemicals including some linked to cancer.



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The Khan Review said:

'A 4-country analysis (of the US, UK, Canada and Australia) indicated that the regulatory environment influenced the success of quitting using vapes, with more favourable policy frameworks being associated with greater quitting success.' (p.38)

We say:

This paper also shows that people in less restrictive regulatory environments (UK and USA) using NRT or stop smoking medicines were just as likely to sustain a 30-day abstinence from cigarette smoking as those using vaping as a cessation method. Given this, we are not sure how this supports increased access to vapes.

'A 2022 report from Australia concluded that "use of e-cigarettes for a smoking cessation attempt appears to be associated with greater success among Australians who attempted to quit tobacco in 2019 compared with Australians attempting to quit without e-cigarettes [vapes], after adjusting for confounding effects."' (p.39)

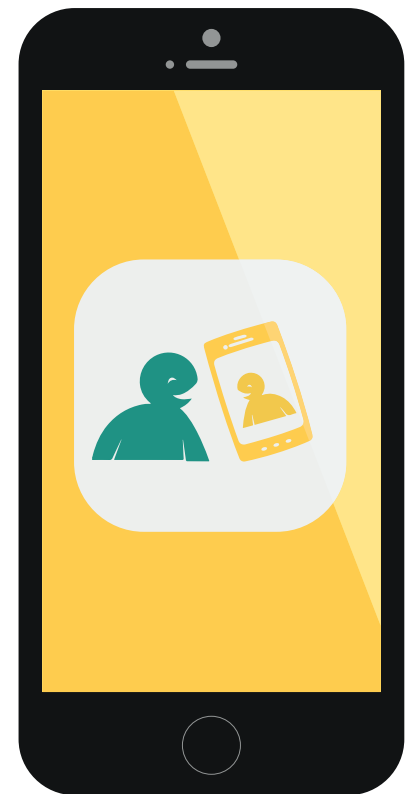
This analysis of the Australian National Drug Strategy Household Survey (2019) found that people trying to quit in the past year had used a range of cessation aids – suggesting a group of people very motivated to quit and prepared to try anything. For a small number (12%, n=189), this included vaping. At the time of the study around 50% were still using vapes (so swap or dual use, not a quit). Analysis also suggested that:

- using vapes gave 68% higher odds of quitting (compared to not using vapes)
- using a quit smoking app gave 74% higher odds of quitting (compared to not using an app)

On this evidence we recommend the use of [My QuitBuddy](#) over vaping.

'The Cochrane Review on e-cigarettes [vapes] for smoking cessation found that like for like, vapes are as effective for smoking cessation as licensed medicines, with no greater risk of adverse effects.' (p.39)

We have highlighted one problem with this review (which it has in common with other studies favouring vaping as a cessation tool) **before**: quitting is defined only in terms of abstinence from tobacco and ongoing vaping is not considered. We call this switching, not quitting. [ANU's review](#) rated the Cochrane review as 'less independent than other reviews because four of its authors were also investigators in the included trials.'



Using a quit smoking app gave 74% higher odds of quitting

So, as you can see, we are not convinced by the evidence the UK Government has presented in support of its 'Swap to Stop' scheme. We are also concerned that the rhetoric surrounding this initiative reflects the views of the tobacco industry, openly paving the way for them to succeed in their strategy to 'generate an increasingly greater proportion of our revenues from products other than cigarettes' ([British American Tobacco](#)). We can find no evidence to suggest any government 'must embrace the promotion of vaping as an effective tool to help people to quit smoking tobacco' (Khan Review, p.10) and believe the proposal that the UK Government 'modify advertising rules so vapes can be promoted as a less harmful product' (Khan Review, p.40) is a worryingly backward step that will create more harm, not less.

Moreover, the suggestion that promoting vaping will make the UK 'a country where the tobacco industry won't want to trade' seems quite naïve given the industry has made it clear that its growth strategy will be accelerated if 'governments create regulations that acknowledge these smoke-free products are better than continued smoking and encourage adults who would otherwise continue to smoke to switch to them.' ([Philip Morris International](#))

Let's be very clear. Companies like Philip Morris International (PMI) and British American Tobacco (BAT) do not want to cease trading. PMI's website states clearly that they are 'staking our entire future on a line of smoke-free products' whilst BAT's mission of 'stimulating the senses of new adult generations' is clearly focused on consumer growth.

According to the Khan Review 'Tobacco is a dying industry. Its days are numbered.' (p.18)

Unfortunately, this just isn't true (check their profits). Schemes like 'Swap to Stop' throw the industry yet another lifeline. What we need to do is advocate for better regulation (particularly at the border) and stronger, more consistent enforcement of existing legislation. At the same time, we must carry on educating people about the harms of vaping and the benefits of being vape free as part of our broader TIS activities. Whilst vaping is on the increase, smoking tobacco is still more common than vaping. The mainstay of the tobacco industry's business has not changed. Addressing vaping is important but should not distract from tackling tobacco use.