

# **THE ROLE OF SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE IN SHAPING POLICY AND REGULATION FOR TOBACCO HARM REDUCTION**

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Good afternoon distinguished guests, ...

As a firm believer in the transformative power of science to guide public health policy. I believe scientific advancements have laid the groundwork for improved regulation and harm reduction strategies, but the rapid evolution of nicotine-containing products necessitates ongoing research.

Over the past few decades, a wealth of scientific evidence has highlighted the risks associated with traditional cigarette products, while also paving new ways for harm reduction strategies.

However, as the market continues to evolve with the introduction of innovative nicotine delivery systems, additional research is essential, and as well regulations and policies to address possible challenges.

One of the main goals of public health research is to inform health-related policies.

(as we all might know...) Globally, there are over 1 billion people who continue to smoke, and 80 per cent of these people live in low- and middle-income countries – Like Africa.

Each year, there are 8 million smoking-related deaths record worldwide.

While millions are spent on tobacco control efforts, the number of smokers is the same as it was ten years plus ago.

Despite the evidence in favour of tobacco harm reduction (THR) using safer nicotine products - such as vaping devices, snus, nicotine pouches and heated tobacco products, the World Health Organization remain opposed to these approach in their regulation guidelines.

Scientific evidence, like the highly respected and independent organization - Cochrane, consistently have shown that switching to less harmful alternatives can dramatically reduce the risks associated with smoking. Country like England, thru the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) and Public Health England (PHE) have published comprehensive draft guideline recommendations to tackle the health burden of smoking in their country.

Yet, these findings often face resistance—not because the science is flawed, but because of deep rooted ideologies, misinformation, and, sometimes, competing interests.

Misaligned regulations, driven by fear rather than facts, stifle innovation and block access to life-saving alternatives for those who need them the most. Innovative products like e-cigarettes,

heated tobacco devices, and oral nicotine pouches have emerged as alternatives that significantly reduce exposure to harmful chemicals compared to combustible cigarettes. The evidence supporting their role in harm reduction is growing and cannot be ignored.

The way forward is to ask ourselves: How can we bridge the gap between evidence and policy? The answer lies in fostering a culture where science is not just respected but central to decision-making - void of bias, religious ethics, and conservative sentiments.

**First**, policymakers must commit to impartiality. Decisions should be guided by independent, peer-reviewed research rather than sensational headlines or vested interests.

**Second**, regulators must engage with all stakeholders—including scientists, public health experts, and consumers. Lived experiences and real-world data from people who have successfully transitioned to safer alternatives - this adds depth to the scientific narrative. ( add - this helps regulators in enforcing strict age limits to prevent the younger generations to access THR products and marketing controls)

**Third**, we must prioritize public education by promoting public awareness - Misinformation undermines trust in safer nicotine products. Policymakers must ensure that the public receives accurate information about the relative risks of nicotine products, empowering individuals to make informed choices.

We must encourage open dialogue between scientists, policymakers, public health organizations, and the public to ensure that policy decisions are informed by the best available evidence.

**Fourthly**, encourage responsible innovations by Collaboration between researchers, regulators, and public health advocates to ensure that emerging evidence is translated into policies that prioritize health equity and long-term well-being. As well as conduct large-scale, continued studies to assess population-level impacts of THR adoption.

## **In Conclusion**

Tobacco harm reduction offers a transformative opportunity to reduce smoking-related harms on a global scale. However, this potential can only be fully realized if we address scientific research gaps, implementing balanced regulations, and fostering collaboration between stakeholders – I believe this will pave the way for a future where innovation in harm reduction is both effective and ethical. By navigating these complexities, we can move closer to a society with fewer tobacco-related harms - while safeguarding the well-being of younger generations.

Thank you.