

## Media Release: The Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand's response to the National Health and Medical Research Council's Assessment on Electronic Cigarettes

The latest advice on the use of electronic cigarettes has been delivered by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) via the 2022 NHMRC CEO Statement on Electronic Cigarettes<sup>1</sup>.

In the press conference on 23rd June 2022, Chief Executive Officer of NHMRC, Professor Anne Kelso, said the Statement on Electronic Cigarettes was the result of targeted consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of the Commonwealth and the Chief Health Officers of each State and Territory. The Thoracic Society welcomes the extensive analysis of the evidence on the potential harms or benefits of electronic cigarette use in our communities. We call on all levels of government to use this opportunity to re-focus policy and practice based on the latest evidence on electronic cigarettes.

This statement highlights the increase in use of electronic cigarettes, over past five years, particularly among young people. In 2021, New Zealand Youth19 survey<sup>2</sup> also found a significant proportion of adolescents, including non-smokers, use nicotine-containing electronic-cigarettes. Additionally, reports from NHMRC<sup>3</sup>, CSIRO<sup>4</sup> and a European Respiratory Society task force<sup>5</sup> all suggest that the use of electronic cigarettes amongst young people can lead to increased uptake of smoking conventional cigarettes<sup>6</sup>. The use of e-cigarettes in any setting other than cessation should not be permitted. Even in the setting of smoking cessation, e-cigarettes remain controversial. We note the latest evidence suggesting electronic cigarettes are not proven to be safe and effective smoking cessation aids<sup>7-10</sup> and repeat our call for other proven treatments to remain frontline options to assist smoking cessation.

Associate Professor Emily Stone, respiratory physician and convenor of the Thoracic Society tobacco special interest group said that *"E-cigarettes have so far failed to meet the needs of people addicted to nicotine. They are marketed aggressively to young people, the chemicals they contain are unknown and the evidence for their role in helping people quit cigarettes is weak. The Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand has a non-negotiable commitment to the health of our communities. We fully support the NHMRC in its call for research into the effects of e-cigarettes, for full transparency of e-cigarette constituents to protect our patients and their families."*

Professor Kelso's statement further affirms that electronic cigarettes may contain nicotine even if they are labelled nicotine-free and that over 200 potentially harmful chemicals have been detected in e-cigarettes. The Thoracic Society notes a rampant use of disposable high-strength nicotine containing vaping devices, many of which have no indication on the device or packaging that they contain nicotine. Packaging requirements for all vaping products legally distributed in Australia and New Zealand should be standardised to avoid accidental ingestion of nicotine and other harmful chemicals.

Electronic cigarettes cause multiple health issues such as nicotine addiction, acute respiratory symptoms and lung damage<sup>11</sup>. Long term effects of e-cigarette use will require dedicated attention and funding support to understand. Given this, there is a strong case to introduce regulations to ban these products as readily available consumer items.

The Thoracic Society regards vaping, particularly in children, young people and non-smokers, as a public health emergency affecting a significant proportion of our communities. Given our long history in leading tobacco control issues we will continue to strongly advocate for - and work with Governments to- drive policy implementation that addresses the evidence presented and protects the lung health of our communities. As noted by Professor John Upham, President of the Thoracic Society *"We call on the Commonwealth Government to act now to protect our nation's lung health"*.

-Ends-

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