

Stop smoking services called upon to support the switch to vaping

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A recent study found the ban on nicotine for vaping, calls by some public health academics to further restrict access to vaping products and where people could vape, compelled vapers to form self-help groups. Credit: Massey University

Government funded stop smoking services will keep losing customers if

they refuse to help people who want to try vaping, new research has found. The services are in a bind however because the legality of selling nicotine vaping products in New Zealand remains in doubt.

The previous National-led Government claimed nicotine vaping products could not be legally imported and sold in New Zealand, but late last year they promised new regulations to allow the sale of nicotine e-cigarettes and e-liquids. Last week National MP Nicky Wagner, who championed the promised law change, introduced a private member's bill to get vaping back on the Government's agenda.

Vaping researcher Professor Marewa Glover, from Massey University's School of Health Sciences says, six months in to the new Labour Government's term, "all Associate Minister of Health Jenny Salesa has said on the matter is that she didn't know what their position on e-cigarettes was going to be."

She adds: "Two weeks ago Judge Patrick Butler dismissed a Ministry of Health case against tobacco giant Philip Morris on the grounds that the iQos Heets product could not be considered a 'chewing' tobacco product, which would be banned under the Smoke-Free Environments Act [SFEA]. His ruling could equally apply to nicotine vaping products, meaning they can be legally imported and sold in New Zealand. Of greater significance, he concluded that the Ministry of Health's prosecution, which sought to restrict smokers' access to an alternative less harmful product was the 'opposite of what Parliament sought to achieve when passing the SFEA'."

Judge Butler's questioning of the [health](#) authority's attempt to undermine people's chance to stop smoking by switching to use of a harm reduced product mirrors the perceptions of vapers reported in a new research paper by Trish Fraser of Global Public Health and Professor Glover and Dr. Penelope Truman from Massey University's College of Health.

Professor Glover says the study found the ban on nicotine for vaping, calls by some public health academics to further restrict access to vaping products and where people could vape, compelled vapers to form self-help groups. "Vapers set up online forums where they could support people wanting to switch from smoking to vaping. Individuals and the newly formed groups organised vape-meets to provide a supportive place where smokers could learn about vaping.

"When they heard that peoples' GPs and the government-funded stop smoking services were refusing to support people in their choice to vape, the vaping community stepped in to fill the gap. They began providing a kind of alternative cessation support to smokers. One on one they were helping family, friends, work mates and even strangers on the street, with advice on how to switch to vaping and where to buy a device and nicotine e-liquid. One group even set up mentors throughout the country to provide support to new vapers in their area," Professor Glover says.

"There was quite a bit of anger about the way vapers had been treated and that inaccurate claims that vaping was dangerous was leading to bans on vaping. The vapers said they had to quickly learn how to lobby local Councils and MPs. When Nicky Wagner's Smoke-free Environments [Regulation of Electronic Cigarettes] Amendment Bill is considered, it will be important that the proposed restrictions that the bill will introduce do not, as Judge Butler warned, go against the intent of the Act – that is, to reduce the harm of tobacco smoking," Professor Glover says.

The researchers add that if the health sector does not change to supporting smokers to vape instead of smoking, then the government should switch to funding vaper-to-smoker peer-led interactions in community contexts where these interactions are naturally occurring.

In the study, 29 vapers were interviewed to learn about the barriers preventing people who smoked from switching to less harmful electronic

cigarettes. The study, published in *Harm Reduction Journal* last week, was conducted in 2016 before the National-led Government announced their intention to introduce regulations to control local sales of nicotine e-liquids.

"Government and [public health](#) responses to e-cigarettes in New Zealand: Vapers' perspectives" was published in the *Harm Reduction Journal* on April 5 2018.

More information: Trish Fraser et al. Government and public health responses to e-cigarettes in New Zealand: vapers' perspectives, *Harm Reduction Journal* (2018). [DOI: 10.1186/s12954-018-0219-9](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12954-018-0219-9)

Provided by Massey University

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