Truth telling about tobacco and nicotine

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Debate among public health professionals over approaches to tobacco and nicotine regulation has intensified with the rise of vaping in the form of electronic cigarettes (or e-cigarettes) and tobacco heat-not-burn products.

A new article from researchers at the Prevention Research Center of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation explores the contours of the debate and the need for public health professionals to include the concerns and voices of the affected public when crafting and disseminating messages about the relative effects of use of these products.

In "Truth Telling about Tobacco and Nicotine", researchers Rachelle Annechino and Tamar Antin explain that, although there is agreement among researchers about evidence that vaping can be less harmful than combustible cigarettes, the tobacco control community remains divided about how to communicate—or even whether to communicate—information about the relative risks of tobacco and nicotine products.

Furthermore, the views of the people who use these products are not often considered when crafting public health campaigns. Research conducted by the authors suggests that people affected by smoking disparities want accurate and comprehensive information about the differential harms of tobacco and nicotine replacement products and are dismayed by current public health campaigns.

The lack of widespread accurate and comprehensive information available to the public has very serious consequences. Without informational access, people affected by the debate are often misinformed about the topic. That means that they can neither make informed choices to reduce risks to their health nor make helpful recommendations as participants in community policymaking.

The authors argue that, to promote trust, public health institutions must develop truth-telling relationships with the communities they serve and be genuinely responsive to what people themselves want to know about tobacco and nicotine products.

Says Ms. Annechino: "There's a lot of debate in public health over whether harm reduction is a good way to think about tobacco. Regardless of where public health professionals fall in that debate, people need to be able to trust public health institutions as resources for information—including information about the relative harms of these products."

More information: Rachelle Annechino et al, Truth Telling about Tobacco and Nicotine, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2019). DOI: 10.3390/ijerph16040530

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