

With Vectura acquisition, tobacco giant Philip Morris will profit from treating the illnesses its products create

September 30 2021, by Kristin Carson-Chahhoud, Bruce Thompson, John Upham



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Cigarettes are the only legal consumer product that [kill up to half of their](#)

[users](#) when consumed exactly as the manufacturer intended. The diseases they cause cost Australia's health system [A\\$136.9 billion](#) a year.

Philip Morris International (PMI) is one of the [global leaders](#) in the cigarette supply chain. But with [steady declines](#) in cigarette sales over the past 20 years, [tobacco companies](#) such as Philip Morris are now [attempting to market themselves](#) as health-care companies with visions for a "smoke-free future."

One of the industry's first moves was to [manufacture](#) non-cigarette nicotine products, such as nicotine replacement therapy to help people quit smoking.

In the latest move to diversify its portfolio, Philip Morris has acquired British health-care company Vectura Group Plc, [at a cost of](#) more than £1 billion (A\$1.9 billion).

[Vectura](#) specializes in manufacturing inhalation products such as commonly used inhalers (or puffers) and nebulisers that help people with asthma and lung disease to breathe.

On August 12, the [Vectura board announced](#) it "unanimously recommended the PMI offer" to shareholders, with the decision based on price and access to resources.

The Vectura [board noted](#): "[...] wider stakeholders could benefit from PMI's significant financial resources and its intentions to increase research and development investment and to operate Vectura as an autonomous business unit that will form the backbone of its inhaled therapeutics business."

On September 15, the [deal became official](#). And so the problems begin.

Why Vectura?

In acquiring Vectura, Philip Morris will [profit from](#) treating the very illnesses its products cause, as nebulisers are commonly prescribed for patients with tobacco-related lung disease.

Philip Morris's [interest](#) in the company is to help it generate "[...] at least \$1 billion in annual net revenues from Beyond Nicotine sources in 2025." In other words, Philip Morris plans to expand development of electronic cigarettes and start profiting from other inhaled devices.

This is despite there being [limited evidence](#) to support electronic cigarettes to help people quit smoking, but [mounting evidence](#) showing damaging health effects.

If Philip Morris really wants to move "beyond nicotine," it should stop its [aggressive promotion and sale](#) of all tobacco products.

Why does it matter?

The consequences of Philip Morris's acquisition of Vectura are far reaching, especially for the medical and research workforce fighting against respiratory disease. The Philip Morris takeover will have [significant implications](#) for the sector.

Many public health organizations, medical professional bodies, universities, individual health professionals and researchers cannot and will not work with tobacco companies or their affiliates. This is in line with the World Health Organization's [Framework Convention on Tobacco Control](#).

This means researchers who would have received support from Vectura,

or used their products to pioneer the next generation of inhaler therapies, will no longer be able to do this.

There will be [conflicts of interest](#) prohibiting them from publishing their findings, collaborating on grants for new research, and presenting their work at conferences.

This has already begun to happen, with pharmaceutical industry conferences such as the Drug Delivery to the Lungs Conference terminating Vectura's sponsorship, forcing the company's representative to stand down from its committee, and [barring them](#) from [participation](#).

Going forward, companies, health professionals and researchers now inadvertently linked to big tobacco through Vectura may be restricted from fully participating in the medical and scientific community. The European Respiratory Society, for example, [excludes participation](#) from anyone with links to the tobacco industry in the past ten years.

The Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) will need to consider if it's appropriate for Australian taxpayers to subsidize inhaler devices licensed to Vectura or, more truthfully, to big tobacco.

Many doctors will be looking for alternative devices to prescribe for their patients that do not contribute to Philip Morris's or Vectura's profits.

Meanwhile, people with lung disease are also likely to be reluctant to use [devices linked to big tobacco](#).

But [switching](#) from one inhaler to another comes with consequences, such as lower adherence and new side effects, causing poorer clinical outcomes.

There are also concerns Philip Morris's takeover of Vectura [could be used](#) to buy "a seat at the table" with health care policymakers and professionals, meaning they could have a say in the development of government policies.

The tobacco industry hasn't changed

The [tobacco](#) industry remains one of the world's [most lethal](#). And Philip Morris continues to undermine public health messages, while [trying to disguise itself](#) as a health brand.

Yet Philip Morris's company statutory regulations, which are the standards by which they undertake business, [list](#) evidence-based actions to reduce smoking rates—such as strong health warnings on packets and smoking bans in public places—as "risk factors" for its business.

Philip Morris's move into the [health](#) sector, reinforced with the latest acquisition of Vectura, should be met with equal measures of disgust and contempt.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: With Vectura acquisition, tobacco giant Philip Morris will profit from treating the illnesses its products create (2021, September 30) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-09-vectura-acquisition-tobacco-giant-philip.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--