

Addiction researchers denounce Australia's NHMRC statement on e-cigarettes

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Eleven top international addiction scientists argue that the 2022 statement on e-cigarettes issued by Australia's peak health and medical body, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC),

fails to meet the high scientific standard expected of a leading national scientific body.

The NHMRC statement, published in June 2022, aims to provide "[public health](#) advice on the safety and impacts of electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) based on review of the current evidence."

This critique of the NHMRC statement, published in the journal *Addiction*, argues that the statement does not accurately summarize the current evidence on e-cigarettes. In fact, it selectively cites evidence in support of a 2017 statement rather than objectively analyzing and incorporating new research. The critique also argues that the NHMRC statement relies heavily on a flawed analysis by the National Centre for Epidemiology and Public Health at the Australian National University.

The authors of the critique cite the following weaknesses of the NHMRC statement:

- It exaggerates the risks of vaping and fails to compare them with smoking.
- It incorrectly claims that adolescent vaping causes subsequent smoking.
- It ignores evidence of the benefits of vaping in helping smokers quit.
- It ignores evidence that vaping is likely already having a positive effect on public health.
- It misapplies the precautionary principle, which requires [policy makers](#) to compare the risks of introducing a product with the risks of delaying its introduction.

According to lead author Dr. Colin Mendelsohn, "Many leading international scientists in the field hold more supportive views than the NHMRC on the potential of e-cigarettes as a strategy to improve public

health. In particular, invoking the precautionary principle to prevent the use of much less harmful smoke-free products is unjustified in the face of the massive public [health](#) burden of smoking."

In sum, argue the authors of this critique, the NHMRC statement confuses association with causation, adopts a double standard by uncritically accepting evidence of harms while being highly skeptical of evidence of benefits, and inappropriately applies the [precautionary principle](#).

More information: A critique of the Australian NHMRC CEO Statement on electronic cigarettes., *Addiction* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/add.16143](#)

Provided by Society for the Study of Addiction

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