

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Select Committee on Tobacco Harm Reduction

Tobacco Harm Reduction

13 November 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000718

Summary of evidence and reports

Spoken

Hansard Page number: 15

Senator: Sarah Henderson

Question:

Senator HENDERSON: What is perhaps the most compelling more recent research that identifies the harm of e-cigarettes?

Ms Edwards: Dr Towler outlined before that there's a large body of evidence, and she gave some examples earlier, which will be on the transcript. We can revisit those, if you'd like, but we perhaps could also take on notice to provide a summary—not exhaustive, obviously—of some of the key references to provide to the committee so that you would have access to that.

Senator HENDERSON: I would appreciate it if you could provide the committee with a summary of some of the more recent evidence and reports. That would be very helpful to the committee.

Ms Edwards: We'd be happy to do that.

Answer:

There are a number of very recent studies and evidence reviews that highlight a range of public health harms associated with the marketing and use of e-cigarettes.

For example, a November 2020 evidence review published in the European Respiratory Journal concluded that '*...e-cigarette use has consequences for asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), which is of significant concern for respiratory and public health*'.¹

Further, a preliminary report on e-cigarettes issued by the European Commission's Scientific Committee on Health, Environmental and Emerging Risks (SHEER) in September 2020

¹ Gotts J and McConnell R.2019. What are the respiratory effects of e-cigarettes? BMJ. Available at: <https://www.bmj.com/content/366/bmj.l5275>Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.

concluded that *'The overall weight of evidence for risks of long-term systemic effects on the cardiovascular system is strong'*, and that the *'overall weight of evidence for risks of poisoning and injuries due to burns and explosion, is strong'*.²

The SHEER report also concluded that nicotine in e-liquids is implicated in the development of addiction, and that there is strong evidence that flavours have a relevant contribution for attractiveness of e-cigarette initiation and use.

The SHEER report further concluded there is strong evidence that e-cigarettes are a gateway to smoking for young people. Broadly similar findings were also reached in a preliminary review of evidence published by the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health (NCEPH) in September 2020.³ The NCEPH report found that never smokers who had used e-cigarettes were, on average, three times as likely as those who have not used e-cigarettes to try conventional cigarettes and transition to tobacco smoking. Similarly, a May 2020 evidence review published by Ireland's Health Research Board found a four-fold positive association between ever using e-cigarettes and initiating conventional cigarette smoking in adolescents.⁴

² SCHEER (Scientific Committee on Health, Environmental and Emerging Risks), Scientific Opinion on electronic cigarettes, 23 September 2020. Available at:

https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/scientific_committees/scheer/docs/scheer_o_017.pdf

³ Banks E, Beckwith K and Joshy G. Summary report on use of e-cigarettes and relation to tobacco smoking uptake and cessation, relevant to the Australian context. Acton ACT: Australian National University, Research School of Population Health, National Centre for Epidemiology & Population Health; 2020. Available from:

<https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/211618/3/E-cigarettes%20smoking%20behaviour%20summary%20report%20final%20200924.pdf>.

⁴ O'Brien D, Long J, Lee C, McCarthy A and Quigley J. Electronic cigarette use and tobacco cigarette smoking initiation in adolescents: An evidence review. Dublin: Health Research Board May 2020. Available from:

https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/33170/1/Electronic_cigarette_use_and_smoking_initiation_in_adolescents.pdf.