E-Cigarettes in Stop Smoking Services

Policy Position Summary

Cancer Research UK is determined to reduce deaths from smoking-related cancers and supports measures to help people quit. Evidence so far suggests electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) are far less harmful than tobacco and may help smokers to cut down or stop smoking.

Stop Smoking Services provide smokers with the best chances of quitting. Smokers should consider a range of quit tools to find the one that suits them best.

To maximise the reach of Stop Smoking Services and to improve service users’ chances of stopping smoking, we believe:

- Stop Smoking Services should be accepting of e-cigarette use and support those who wish to use them alongside behavioural support as an aid to stop smoking.
- Services should provide clients with information and advice about e-cigarettes, improving the chances of stopping smoking for smokers who use e-cigarettes.
- Whatever the method, it is clear that the behavioural support available from local Stop Smoking Services gives smokers the best chance of quitting.
- A balanced approach is needed towards e-cigarettes – one that maximises their potential to help people stop smoking, whilst minimising the risks of unintended consequences that could promote smoking.

Cancer Research UK recognises it can be difficult to recommend or advise on non-licenced products, but given the evidence points towards an opportunity for e-cigarettes to help people stop smoking, services should provide general information and advice alongside existing behavioural support.

E-cigarette use in the UK

E-cigarettes are devices that produce vapour from nicotine dissolved in propylene glycol or glycerine. Unlike cigarettes, they do not contain tobacco, do not create smoke and do not rely on combustion. It is estimated that 3.2 million people in Great Britain currently use e-cigarettes. Use has remained fairly stable, at around 5% of the population, since 2013.

E-cigarettes represent a clear opportunity to reduce tobacco consumption due to their unprecedented popularity: they are now the most popular choice of smoking cessation aid in the UK (see Figure 1). Since 2017, there have been more ex-smokers (1.5 million) who use e-cigarettes than current smokers (1.3 million) who use e-cigarettes. Over half (52%) of current e-cigarette users are ex-smokers and 45% are smokers. A Cancer Research UK-funded study suggested that e-cigarettes may have contributed to an additional 18,000 long-term ex-smokers in England in 2015.

Evidence so far shows the overwhelming majority of e-cigarette users, also referred to as vapers, are current or ex-smokers, and use by non-smokers is extremely low. E-cigarette uptake and regular use among children is also extremely low and there is currently no evidence to support concerns about a gateway effect to tobacco smoking. Smoking prevalence in young people continues to decline. Cancer Research UK will continue to monitor trends of youth use of nicotine-containing products.
Evidence so far suggests e-cigarettes are much safer than tobacco cigarettes.\textsuperscript{9,10} An independent review commissioned by Public Health England (PHE) estimated that e-cigarettes are around 95% safer than tobacco cigarettes and may help smokers to cut down or stop smoking.\textsuperscript{11} Similarly, the Royal College of Physicians estimated e-cigarettes to present 5% of the risk of smoking tobacco.\textsuperscript{12}\textsuperscript{13}

While nicotine is addictive, and not entirely harmless, e-cigarettes do not contain tobacco, or the extensive cocktail of cancer-causing chemicals found in combustible tobacco.\textsuperscript{12,13} Concerns around e-cigarettes causing the disease known as popcorn lung are not based on evidence, and the chemical thought to be responsible for this disease has been banned from use in e-liquids in Europe.\textsuperscript{14}

However, because e-cigarettes are relatively new on the market, the long-term health implications of these products are unclear. The long-term health impacts of using tobacco are, however, well-documented, and thus e-cigarettes have an important role to play in harm reduction.

Cancer Research UK has increased its investment in e-cigarette research to contribute to the rapidly growing evidence base to help inform smokers and policy-makers looking to reduce the harm from tobacco.

Given the relative harm between tobacco cigarettes and e-cigarettes, smokers should have access to e-cigarettes to help them to stop. However, non-smokers and children should not use them.

**Do e-cigarettes help smokers to quit?**

Growing evidence shows e-cigarettes can help people to stop smoking, including a 2016 Cochrane review\textsuperscript{15} and a 2018 meta-analysis.\textsuperscript{16} An English study showed that individuals using an e-cigarette are around 60% more likely to quit compared to going cold turkey or using over-the-counter nicotine replacement therapy.\textsuperscript{17}
Evidence has shown that e-cigarettes are more effective when used alongside specialist behavioural support than when used unsupported.\textsuperscript{18} A 2019 CRUK-funded study showed that using e-cigarettes in combination with behavioural support was nearly twice as effective as NRT and behavioural support.\textsuperscript{19}

Whatever the method, it is clear that the behavioural support available from local Stop Smoking Services gives smokers the best chance of quitting. We recommend using Stop Smoking Services for the highest chance of quitting (with or without e-cigarettes), as we know it can increase the likelihood of successfully quitting by roughly three times compared to doing it alone.\textsuperscript{20}

The number of people accessing Stop Smoking Services is declining, but so far this has not been shown to be associated with increasing use of e-cigarettes\textsuperscript{21} and is more likely to be due to the transition from Stop Smoking Services from the NHS to local authorities causing a disjoint in referral pathways, as well as reductions to funding of mass media quit campaigns. We recommend that Stop Smoking Services ensure there are simple referral pathways from the NHS into the service to help drive up footfall and give smokers the best chances of quitting.

The popularity of e-cigarettes across all social classes mean they may be important as a quit tool for disadvantaged groups, who are more likely to use tobacco and generally find it harder to quit.\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Case study: Working with independent vape shops}

In Essex, Thurrock Council is trialling an innovative way of supporting more smokers to quit – partnering with a local independent vape shop. “More and more, we see people using an e-cigarette to stop smoking, so this partnership is a really exciting opportunity for us,” says Tina Lincoln, public health service manager at Thurrock Council, “By working with a vape shop, we can reach people who may not visit a traditional Stop Smoking Service, and ensure they’re getting support that will give them the best chance of quitting.”

Under the agreement, local vape shop Planet Plume will encourage smokers to give up tobacco by offering them a free ‘e-cigarette starter pack’. Staff have been trained to deliver smoking cessation support to customers within the shop. “Planet Plume is an independent shop with no links to the tobacco industry, so we know their first priority is to help people quit smoking for good,” Tina adds.

“We’ve had really positive feedback on the partnership so far and we’re looking forward to seeing the results from the contract over the coming months.”
\end{quote}

\section*{E-cigarette use in Stop Smoking Services}

Smokers should consider a range of quit tools so they can choose the one that suits them best. E-cigarettes are now the most popular quitting method and the evidence suggests that e-cigarettes can help people to stop smoking. Therefore, to maximise the reach of Stop Smoking Services and to improve service users’ chances of stopping smoking, these services should be accepting of e-cigarette use.
We recommend that services inform users of all quit options available to them, including comprehensive information and advice on e-cigarettes. For those who wish to use an e-cigarette as an aid to stop smoking, services can provide information and advice based on National Centre for Smoking Cessation and Training (NCSCT) guidance (see below). It is important that services also offer behavioural support to those who wish to use e-cigarettes as an aid to stop smoking. These recommendations are in line with NICE guidance, NG92.

**How is the tobacco industry involved?**

The tobacco industry has a growing interest in the e-cigarette market and owns several different e-cigarette brands. Tobacco companies are increasingly attempting to position themselves as champions of harm reduction, as exemplified by the Philip Morris International (PMI) -funded Foundation for a Smokefree World (whose stated aim is to improve global health by ending smoking in this generation). In the UK, PMI has launched the ‘Hold My Light’ quit campaign to promote its other products, including heated tobacco products and e-cigarettes. There have also been several recent examples of the tobacco industry attempting to provide support to local authorities on e-cigarettes – from advice to the provision of e-cigarette products.

It is important that the tobacco industry’s involvement in this market does not provide them with an opportunity to participate as a stakeholder in public health and influence health policy. Cancer Research UK is actively monitoring this. Public health policy must be protected by the vested interests of the tobacco industry, as outlined by the World Health Organisation’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, to which the UK is a signatory.\(^{23}\)

In line with this, Stop Smoking Services should reject all partnerships and non-binding or non-enforceable agreements with the tobacco industry.

**Where can Stop Smoking Services get advice about e-cigarettes?**

The National Centre for Smoking Cessation and Training (NCSCT), in partnership with Public Health England (PHE), has created various resources to assist Stop Smoking Services in supporting patients who want to use e-cigarettes to help them quit smoking. A summary of their recommendations is below.\(^{24}\)
NCSCT Recommendations for Practice:

1. Be open to e-cigarette use in people keen to try them; especially in those who have tried and failed to stop smoking using licensed stop smoking medicines.
2. Provide advice on e-cigarettes (outlined below).
3. Multi-session behavioural support provided by trained stop smoking practitioners will improve the chances of successfully stopping smoking whether or not people use e-cigarettes. It may be useful to encourage clients to familiarise themselves with the use of their e-cigarette before setting a quit date.
4. Stop smoking services can provide behavioural support to clients who are using e-cigarettes and can include this in their national data returns.
5. Clients of stop smoking services who are using an e-cigarette and who also want to use NRT can safely use the two in conjunction. They do not need to have stopped using the e-cigarette before they can use NRT.

NCSCT Advice on E-Cigarettes:

- E-cigarettes provide nicotine in a form that is much safer than smoking.
- Some people find e-cigarettes helpful for quitting, cutting down their nicotine intake and/or managing temporary abstinence.
- There are a wide range of e-cigarettes and people may need to try various types, flavours and nicotine dosages before they find a product that they like.
- E-cigarette use is not like smoking and people may need to experiment and learn to use them effectively (e.g. longer ‘drags’ may be required and a number of short puffs may be needed initially to activate the vaporiser and improve nicotine delivery). They may also need to recognise when atomisers need replacing.
- People previously using e-cigarettes while smoking (e.g. to reduce the number of cigarettes that they smoke) may need to consider changing devices and/or nicotine concentrations when making a quit attempt.
- Although some health risks from e-cigarette use may yet emerge, these are likely, at worst, to be a small fraction of the risks of smoking. This is because e-cigarette vapour does not contain the products of combustion (burning) that cause lung and heart disease, and cancer.

Other useful resources include:

- Cancer Research UK’s e-cigarette hub for health professionals, available at www.cruk.org/ecighub
- The “Staying Switched: Advice for new vapers from old hands” leaflet, based on Cancer Research UK-funded research, available from the University of East Anglia’s website.25
- “E-cigarettes: A guide for healthcare professionals” NCSCT online training26
- NICE Guidelines NG92 on Stop smoking interventions and services27
- NCSCT briefing, “Working with vape shops: A guide for commissioners and stop smoking services”28
The UK E-Cigarette Research Forum monthly e-cigarette research bulletin

PCRS guide to diagnosis and management of tobacco dependency

12 Goniewicz et al. (2013) Levels of selected carcinogens and toxicants in vapour from electronic cigarettes. Tobacco Control, doi:10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2012-050859
26 NCST, E-cigarettes: A guide for healthcare professionals. http://elearning.ncsct.co.uk/e-cigarettes-stage_1