

Learning from the Best: A Tobacco Harm Reduction Primer

Countries like the United Kingdom and Sweden prove that lower smoking rates can be achieved with an open approach toward alternative nicotine products. Smoke-free goals can be reached if governments learn from the best, and most effective. Countries with a relatively high adoption of alternative nicotine products such as vaping, heated tobacco, nicotine pouches, and snus, generally lower smoking rates faster than other countries. It is time to learn from the best.

Here are five global lessons every country should adopt to become a tobacco harm reduction champion:

1 Vape like the Brits

What is vaping?

When a liquid is heated by an electronic device and transformed into an aerosol (vapour), it is referred to as vaping.

The United Kingdom is the most progressive country when it comes to vaping. The government and public health fully endorse vaping as a harm reduction tool, and smokers are encouraged to switch to this less harmful alternative. In the UK, smoking rates had fallen by more than *29% in the last decade* (when vaping became popular). Compared to the EU, smoking rates in the UK have fallen *twice as fast*.

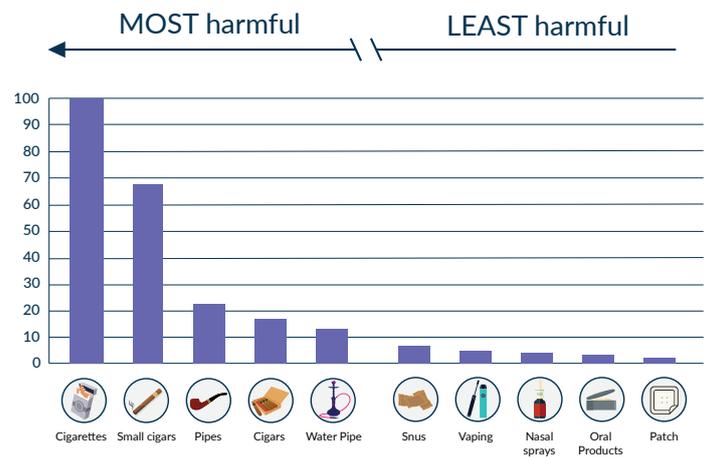
Key facts:

- Vaping is *95% less harmful than smoking*. Over 100 governmental and non-governmental organisations agree that vaping is less harmful than smoking.
- Vaping *helps smokers quit* and is *twice as effective* for quitting smoking as nicotine replacement therapies (NRTs).
- The embrace of vaping helped the UK to reduce smoking rates faster than countries opposing vaping.

Recommendations:

- Encourage current smokers to switch to vaping, like in the United Kingdom.
- Guarantee access to vaping products for adults and prevent flavour bans: it is essential that affordability and variety are ensured.
- Risk-based regulation and taxation: Vaping is not smoking and must not be treated the same.

Nicotine Products Risk Continuum



Source: <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-016-3079-9/figures/1>

2 Snus like the Swedes

What is snus?

Snus is a type of oral smokeless tobacco typically applied behind the top lip, either loosely or in pre-measured sachets.

The use of snus has surpassed the smoking of combustible cigarettes in Sweden. Sweden is on the way to becoming the first country to reach the smoke-free goal, with a current smoking rate of 5.6%. Even though the total nicotine consumption in Sweden is within a similar range to other European countries, smoking-related mortality is *much lower*.

Key facts:

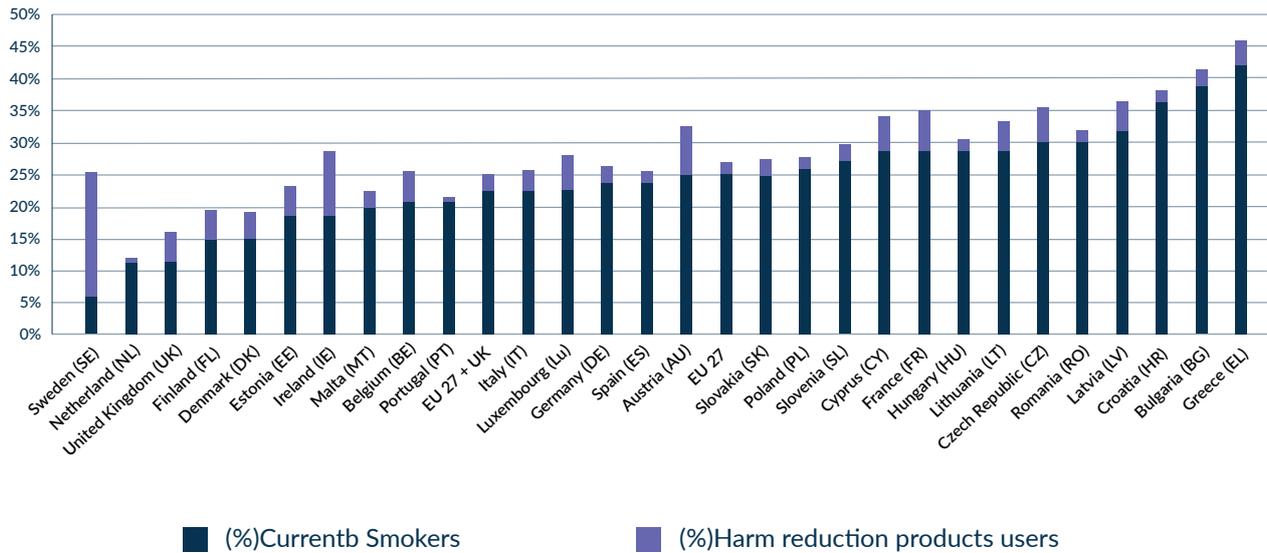
- Snus is far less harmful than smoking and helps smokers quit.
- Sweden is becoming the first country to achieve the smoke-free goal of a 5% smoking rate.
- Public health improved in Sweden due to the transition from smoking to snus.

Recommendations:

- Legalise snus in countries where it is currently banned.
- Risk-based regulation and taxation: Adopt a similar regulatory framework as Sweden (regulated as a consumer product, proper information, minimum age restrictions, etc.)
- Encourage current smokers to switch to snus.

Smokers and harm reduction products users in the EU (%)

Source: Special Eurobarometer 506 (2021)



3

Pouch like nobody else

What are nicotine pouches?

Nicotine pouches don't include tobacco. They do have nicotine, flavourings, sweeteners, and plant-based fibres and are placed between the lip and gum.

Nicotine pouches are the newest smoking alternative and, therefore, not yet adequately regulated in many countries. Currently, they are either unregulated, entirely banned or treated the same as cigarettes in most countries – and none of these alternatives are optimal. With consumer-friendly regulation, nicotine pouches could be a cornerstone of our strive toward smoke-free goals.

Key facts:

- Nicotine pouches are the *least harmful* nicotine alternative to smoking and have a similar risk profile as conventional nicotine replacement products (e.g. gums or patches).
- At the same time, they work as a *smoking cessation* tool.
- Nicotine pouches have *enormous potential* to reduce smoking-related deaths.

Recommendations:

- Applying risk-based regulation to ensure smokers have the incentive to switch.
- As the risk of nicotine pouches is very low (close to NRTs), taxation should be minimal.
- Reasonable quality standards and controls.
- Regulation to ensure that minors don't have access to the products.

4

Heat (but not burn) like the Japanese

What are heat-not-burn products (HnB)?

Electronic devices known as "heat-not-burn" tobacco products heat the tobacco and create an inhalable aerosol instead of burning it like traditional cigarettes.

Within only five years (2016-2021), cigarette sales in Japan plummeted by 43% due to the introduction of heat-not-burn products. More and more people in Japan are rejecting cigarettes and choosing less harmful alternative products such as heat-not-burn. The HnB rate in Japan is currently at about 4.5%, and the Health and Nutrition Survey found that 76% of HnB users were not smoking cigarettes at all anymore.

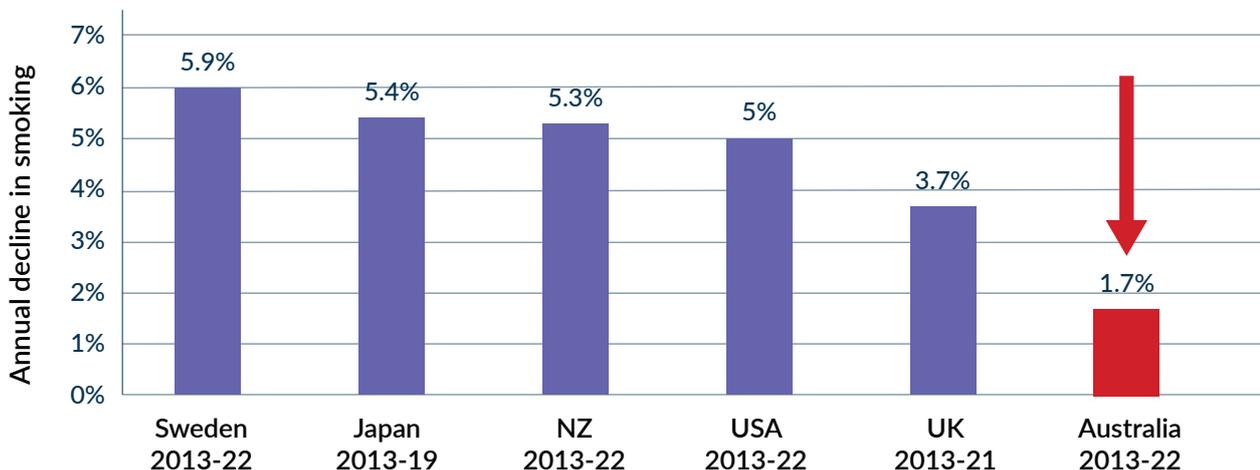
Key facts:

- There's evidence that HnB products are less harmful than smoking. Studies show that the vapour from the devices contains *lower levels* of harmful chemicals compared to cigarette smoke.
- HnB expose users and bystanders to toxicants at *substantially lower levels* than cigarettes.

Recommendations:

- Allow or keep HnB on the market to give smokers another route away from smoking.
- Allow HnB and similar products in outdoor non-smoking areas to further incentivise smokers to switch.

Decline in adult smoking 2013-2022 pa



Source: Dr Colin Mendelsohn (<https://colinmendelsohn.com.au/science-denial/>)

5

Communicate like the Kiwis

Even though New Zealand is very tough on cigarettes, they remember the people. Quitting smoking is one of the hardest things to do, and smokers need all the support they can get instead of being stigmatised. A key aspect is to provide accurate information about alternatives and not scare smokers away from them. Therefore, the Ministry of Health of New Zealand is the best-case example of communicating about vaping. The website [VapingFacts](#), also supported by most public health organisations in New Zealand, provides accurate health information, cessation tips, a helpline, and in-person support opportunities.

Recommendations:

Encourage current smokers to switch to vaping, like in the United Kingdom.

Guarantee access to vaping products for adults and prevent flavour bans: it is essential that affordability and variety are ensured.

Risk-based regulation and taxation: Vaping is not smoking and must not be treated the same.

Five steps to becoming a global tobacco harm reduction champion:

1

Embrace tobacco harm reduction in all forms to increase the chances of reducing smoking for everyone.

4

Implement risk-based regulation to incentivise the transition. Millions of lives are at stake!

2

Quitting smoking is hard! Therefore, people need as many possibilities as possible to quit. Don't discriminate against certain harm-reduction products.

5

Learn from the best! Follow these harm reduction leaders and save millions of lives.

3

Encourage smokers to switch to less harmful alternatives.