



Undermining Progress

How the European Commission's Misinformation Hinders Smoking Cessation

Health Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi has stated that alternative nicotine products are "[100% as harmful as cigarettes](#)" and that vaping "[has created completely new health risks, even bigger than smoking, such as popcorn lung](#)". Climate Commissioner Wopke Hoekstra has declared "[smoking kills, vaping kills](#)." These claims are factually wrong and dangerously block smokers from transitioning to safer alternatives.

The Science They Ignore

Independent reviews confirm [vaping is 95% less harmful than smoking](#), as first found by Public Health England in their landmark 2015 statement and reconfirmed by the [UK Office for Health Improvement & Disparities' review](#) (2022) and [Cochrane's Electronic cigarettes for smoking cessation review](#) (2025). Taken together, these reviews consistently show that vaping exposes users to substantially lower health risks than smoking and helps smokers quit more effectively than traditional nicotine replacement therapies.

"Popcorn lung" from vaping is a myth. Some early buttery e-liquid flavours contained trace amounts of diacetyl—at concentrations hundreds of times lower than in cigarette smoke—linked to a rare lung condition found at extreme exposure levels in popcorn factory workers. Diacetyl was banned from EU e-liquids in 2016, and [Cancer Research UK](#) confirms that "there have been no confirmed cases of popcorn lung linked to e-cigarettes."

Youth Vaping Scaremongering

The Commission often amplifies fears of a "youth vaping epidemic," but EU and international data undermine this narrative. [Eurobarometer](#) shows 97% of adult vapers are current or former smokers. Youth smoking and vaping rates are both declining across EU member states, with [no evidence of a "gateway effect"](#) from vaping to smoking; most youth vapers have tried smoking first or represent experimentation that doesn't progress to regular vaping or smoking. The data instead points to [shared "common liability" risk factors](#) as the main drivers of any youth nicotine experimentation.

Real Consequences

When Commissioners equate vaping with smoking, smokers receive a lethal message: switching makes no difference. As a result, the EU average smoking rate stagnates at 24%, far behind harm reduction leaders like Sweden (5.3%) and the UK (10.6%). In stark contrast, the Czech Republic and Greece achieved rapid progress ([23% and 14% smoking reductions](#)) by endorsing safer alternatives.

This misinformation isn't accidental. It's paving the way for extremely restrictive Tobacco Excise Directive (TED) and Tobacco Products Directive (TPD) updates. The Commission pushes cigarette-level minimum excise taxes on less harmful products and tighter rules that treat alternatives as smoking, removing incentives and access for smokers to switch.

These policies risk stagnating EU smoking rates entirely. Consumers across Europe urge you to vote against upcoming anti-harm reduction measures.