

Dear Select Committee on Tobacco Harm Reduction,

My name is Yvette Hopkins and I am 45 years of age. I am employed as an Administration Assistant in the Health Sector. I am married with no children and live in , country South Australia.

I grew up in an age where cigarette advertising was plastered on every football match. My parents both smoked and many of my peers. I was first introduced to smoking by a friend when I was about 10. I refused the cigarette saying “i smoke, I just don’t want one”. I am sure my friend didn’t believe me.

At the age of about fifteen I started stealing my mum’s smokes, one here and there. Not long afterwards I started buying my own.

I gave up once when I was 20 years old, I had noticed a wheezing noise at night when trying to fall asleep. I held my breath and realised I was making the wheezing noise. I had never had and respiratory issues before this and I realised that smoking was the cause, so I gave up but only lasted for 18 months.

Over many years since that time, my husband and I have repeatedly tried to stop smoking. Quitting together they say is easier. That wasn’t the case for us. We tried all manner of ways to quit, swapping to cigars so we would smoke less, cold turkey, Nicotine Patches (they gave me a rash and were so itchy, it was a constant reminder of trying to quit), Nicotine lozenges (they gave me painful mouth ulcers), Nicotine gum (it didn’t satisfy the cravings and made my jaw ache).

More recently I read about Champix and Zyban and considered trying those but unfortunately having pre-existing anxiety issues, I discounted them as unsuitable. I had enough mental health issues already. A recent consultation with a new doctor indicated that these items would be contraindicated in my situation.

About eight years ago, my mum who had also struggled to quit smoking all my life, started using a Vape pen and Nicotine E-liquid. Mum used the Vape Pen, slowly reduced her Nicotine intake and eventually gave up. She was Free and has not smoked or Vaped since.

My Sister and her Fiance started vaping too, they no longer smoke, only Vape.

My husband and I then came across a television show from the United Kingdom where they did a small trial of smokers giving up with Vaping versus smokers giving up by traditional methods. The show also showed chemical analysis of both the smoke from cigarettes versus vapour from e-cigarettes The vapour having much less of an impact on live cells. The people who vaped were just successful as, if not more successful than the traditional methods.

We were both surprised at the results and this was the impetus for more research on my behalf. I read medical journals and joined a “Vaping” forum. I observed what was posted on these forums for a long time before I decided that this could work for my husband and I. Very few people on these forums had negative health issues regarding Vaping and many of them have vaped for over three years.

We both discussed it and I purchased a couple of Vape Pens and some Nicotine E-Liquid.

The next day, even though we had Tobacco in the house, I was determined that I would not have a cigarette, I would use the Vape Pen instead.

I have not had a cigarette since then. My husband “dual -used” for about a week but he has since told me he didn’t want to waste the tobacco being as expensive as it was to buy.

I then found out that we needed a Prescription to Import Nicotine legally. That was a challenge, finding a Doctor that supported this “harm reduction, smoking cessation” technology, thankfully I found one and we both obtained prescriptions online (that are no longer available).

It has now been two years and eight months since either of us have had a cigarette and neither of us want one.

We have managed to reduce our Nicotine consumption from 12mg to 3mg and clearly on our way to 0mg.

Now that the Health Minister and the TGA are determined to introduce these even more restrictive regulations, I am unsure if we will finish the journey we have started.

I am proud of my husband for sticking with this, at times I know he was tempted to return to Tobacco as the devices we were using were not the best. But they did the job. We have since changed devices which contributed to the lowering of our Nicotine levels.

I am not certain that we will not return to combustible Tobacco, I am pretty sure my husband will if he is not able to Vape.

I have consulted with my doctor for more than nine months with regard to him writing a prescription for me. When I first asked him for a prescription, he was not opposed to it but could not find it on the Prescribing Software, so he said he could not give me one.

I later provided him with the ATHRA information on prescribing Nicotine and details of how I felt I fit the RACGP's requirements for E-Cigarette use.

He has since told me that due to the documentation and difficulty regarding the new regulations and supply of Nicotine he will not supply me with a prescription.

I have now had to consult with another doctor via phone to obtain a prescription.

I therefore see the requirement for a prescription as a waste of my doctors time, my time and a burden on the health system by taking up appointment times for a prescription for something that properly regulated, could be sold as a consumer product as tradition tobacco products are.

In addition to the health benefits I have experienced we have also saved a lot of money one year after stopping smoking we saved \$5850/year by not buying tobacco.

This not only has had financial benefits for us but also for the Government.

My husband suffered a heel injury and required major surgery to repair it. Because we had saved money by Vaping we paid for this surgery in a Private Hospital ourselves, not adding to the burden of the Public Health System, not sitting on a waiting list, unable to work, claiming Sickness Benefits. Paid for, surgery done and back at work, within three months entirety.

The benefits of using Nicotine E-liquid are that:

- people will have an alternative to combustible cigarettes, which we are consistently told are deadly.
- Nicotine E-liquid allows me to satisfy Nicotine cravings in an at least 95% safer way.
- In the two-and-a-half years since I started using Nicotine E-liquid for Vaping my health has improved:
- I no longer have a chesty wheeze or cough, I have not had a cold or Pharyngitis in this period,
- I am calmer and not having to arrange my day around when I will have my next cigarette and this makes the effects of my already diagnosed anxiety symptoms much less and easier to manage,
- I have been able to reduce my Nicotine consumption from 12mg to 3mg at my own pace,
- My oral health has improved and my teeth are cleaner,
- I no longer have stained fingers from smoking cigarettes,
- I can taste foods better and therefore this helps me to eat healthier food,

I am very concerned that if I am not able to continue to source Nicotine E-liquid easily I will return to smoking combustible cigarettes and my health will decline.

I do not support the regulations regarding Nicotine E-Liquid as I believe them to be restrictive and inconsistent with the way the combustible cigarettes are scheduled. If combustible cigarettes are to remain freely available, Nicotine Liquids for Vaping should be added to the exemption list in the same way that “tobacco prepared and packed for smoking” is.

As a consumer the risks of using Nicotine E-Liquids are low, as I am aware of safe handling practices and ensure that any Nicotine E-Liquids are kept in childproof bottles and kept out of the reach of children.

I believe that Nicotine E-liquid should be sold as a consumer product with appropriate safety measures to avoid youth uptake.

I strongly believe that every current smoker should have the choice to access Nicotine E-liquid as an alternative to current NRT replacements therapies. For some of us NRT simply doesn't work and the opportunity to be able to reduce the harm of toxic combustible cigarette smoking will do a great deal to reduce the Health burden on our country, save thousands of lives and improve the lives of many thousands more.

Yours sincerely,  
Yvette Hopkins