Scientific Opinion: Recommendation Against E-Cigarette Flavour Bans

A flavour ban cannot substantially decrease youth use of e-cigarettes because curiosity is the primary motivation for youth to experiment with e-cigarettes. A 2016 German survey reported that 73.1% of 14 to 19 year olds said curiosity was their motivation to try e-cigarettes [1]. A 2018 survey of French 15-16 year olds found curiosity to be the most common reason for trying e-cigarettes [2]. The United States National Youth Tobacco Survey 2019 reported that 56.1% endorsed curiosity as their major reason for trying e-cigarettes, and 23.9% stated that e-cigarette use by peers or family was their motivation, with flavours ranking third at one in five [3].

Another attraction for youth use of e-cigarettes is playing tricks with the vapour – "vape tricks" - the same type of activity as blowing smoke rings. A US survey indicated that 54.4% of experimenters did vape tricks [4]. Although there is no study on Dutch youth, a survey of Dutch adult e-cigarette users found that 24.6% enjoyed doing vape tricks [5].

Furthermore, youth who use flavoured e-cigarettes are less likely to take up smoking than youth who use tobacco flavoured e-cigarettes. A large US study of youth e-cigarette users demonstrated that over five years youth using flavoured e-cigarettes were 34% less likely to start smoking than youth who used tobacco flavoured e-cigarettes [6].

In the Netherlands 43.8% of adults who smoke use e-cigarettes for their quit attempt [7]. **A flavour ban will certainly reduce the number of adults who will successfully quit smoking by substituting e-cigarettes for cigarettes.** A US study calculated that adults under 55 years old who used non-tobacco flavoured e-cigarettes were 228% more successful at quitting smoking than adults who used tobacco flavoured e-cigarettes [6]. Another study found that adults who quit smoking with flavoured e-cigarettes were 283% more successful at being quit for one year or more than adults who used tobacco-flavoured e-cigarettes [8].

Current evidence compiled by the highly respected *Cochrane Review* conclusively demonstrates that e-cigarettes are an effective cessation aid [9]. A ban on e-cigarette flavours will substantially decrease their effectiveness at helping people to quit smoking. A ban on e-cigarette flavours will jeopardize the health outcomes for nearly half of the adults in the Netherlands who are trying to quit smoking.

The stated goal of enacting an e-cigarette flavour ban is to deter youth from trying them. Unfortunately a flavour ban is no panacea for reducing youth experimentation with e-cigarettes. Curiosity and playing vape tricks will continue to motivate youth experimentation even in the absence of flavoured e-cigarettes. Adequate health education and strict enforcement of bans of sales to youth are effective measures to reduce youth use of e-cigarettes.

Therefore, we strongly recommend against a ban on e-cigarette flavours. The projected outcome of a ban would be that substantially fewer adults in the Netherlands will be successful at quitting smoking and only a very small number of youth will be deterred from e-cigarette experimentation.

R. O'Leary, External Researcher; R. Polosa, Founder; and G. Li Volti, Director, Center for the Acceleration of Harm Reduction, University of Catania, Italy.

This Opinion is endorsed by the following members of CoEHAR (listed alphabetically):

1. Salvatore **ALAIMO,** Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Catania, Italy
2. Carmelina Daniela **ANFUSO,** Department of Biomedical and Biotechnological Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
3. Ignazio **BARBAGALLO,** Department of Drug Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
4. Francesco **BASILE,** Department of General Surgery and Medical-Surgical Specialties, University of Catania, Italy
5. Sebastiano **BATTIATO,** Department of Mathematics and Computer Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
6. Gaetano **BERTINO,** Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Catania, Italy
7. Alberto **BIANCHI,** Department of General Surgery and Medical-Surgical Specialties, University of Catania, Italy
8. Antonio G. **BIONDI,** Department of General Surgery and Medical-Surgical Specialties, University of Catania, Italy
9. Maria Luisa **BRANDI,** National Observatory of Fragility Fractures, Italy
10. Emma **CACCIOLA,** Department of Medical, Surgical Sciences and Advanced Technologies, University of Catania, Italy
11. Rossella R. **CACCIOLA,** Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Catania, Italy
12. Bruno Santi **CACOPARDO,** Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Catania, Italy
13. Aldo E. **CALOGERO,** Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Catania, Italy
14. Maria Teresa **CAMBRIA,** Department of Biological, Geological and Environmental Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
15. Davide **CAMPAGNA,** Department of Emergency Medicine, University of Catania Teaching Hospital Policlinico, Italy
16. Filippo **CARACI,** Department of Drug Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
17. Agatino **CARIOLA,** Department of Law Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
18. Massimo **CARUSO,** Department of Biomedical and Biotechnological Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
19. Pasquale **CAPONNETTO,** Department of Educational Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
20. Adriana **CIANCIO,** Department of Law Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
21. Fabio **CIBELLA,** Institute of Biomedicine and Molecular Immunology, National Research Council, Italy
22. Maurizio **DI MAURO**, Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Catania, Italy
23. Santo **DI NUOVO,** Department of Educational Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
24. Adriana **DI STEFANO,** Department of Law Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
25. Salvatore **FAILLA,** Department of Chemical Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
26. Rosario **FARACI,** Department of Economics and Business, University of Catania, Italy
27. Salvatore **FERLITO,** Department of Medical, Surgical Sciences and Advanced Technologies, University of Catania, Italy
28. Margherita **FERRANTE,** Department of Medical, Surgical Sciences and Advanced Technologies, University of Catania, Italy
29. Alfredo **FERRO,** Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Catania, Italy
30. Giancarlo A. **FERRO,** Department of Law Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
31. Francesco **FRASCA,** Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Catania, Italy
32. Lucia **FRITTITTA,** Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Catania, Italy
33. Pio M. **FURNERI,** Department of Biomedical and Biotechnological Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
34. Antonio **GAGLIANO,** Department of Electrical, Electronics and Computer Engineering, University of Catania, Italy

35. Giovanni **GALLO,** Department of Mathematics and Computer Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
36. Fabio **GALVANO,** Department of Biomedical and Biotechnological Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
37. Giuseppe **GRASSO,** Department of Chemical Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
38. Francesca **GUARINO,** Department of Biomedical and Biotechnological Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
39. Antonino **GULINO,** Department of Chemical Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
40. Emmanuele A. **JANNINI,** Department of Systems Medicine, University of Rome Tor Vergata
41. Sandro **LA VIGNERA,** Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Catania, Italy
42. Giuseppe **LAZZARINO,** Department of Biomedical and Biotechnological Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
43. Antonio **LONGO,** Department of General Surgery and Medical-Surgical Specialties, University of Catania, Italy
44. Gabriella **LUPO,** Department of Biomedical and Biotechnological Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
45. Mario **MALERBA,** Department of Translational Biomedicine, University of Eastern Piedmont, Italy
46. Luigi **MARLETTA,** Department of Electrical, Electronics and Computer Engineering, University of Catania, Italy
47. Guido **NICOLOSI,** Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
48. Francesco **NOCERA,** Department of Electrical, Electronics and Computer Engineering, University of Catania, Italy
49. Gea **OLIVERI CONTI,** Department of Medical, Surgical Sciences and Advanced Technologies, University of Catania, Italy
50. Rosalba **PARENTI,** Department of Biomedical and Biotechnological Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
51. Alfredo **PULVIRENTI,** Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Catania, Italy
52. Francesco **PURRELLO,** Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Catania, Italy
53. Francesco **RAPISARDA,** Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Catania, Italy
54. Venerando **RAPISARDA,** Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Catania, Italy
55. Michele **REIBALDI,** Department of General Surgery and Medical-Surgical Specialties, University of Catania, Italy
56. Renata **RIZZO,** Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Catania, Italy
57. Simone **RONSISVALLE,** Department of Drug Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
58. Martino **RUGGIERI,** Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Catania, Italy
59. Maria C. **SANTAGATI,** Department of Biomedical and Biotechnological Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
60. Cristina **SATRIANO,** Department of Chemical Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
61. Laura **SCIACCA,** Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Catania, Italy
62. Maria Salvina **SIGNORELLI,** Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Catania, Italy
63. Marco **TATULLO,** Technologica Research Institute, Marrelli Hospital, Italy
64. Daniele **TIBULLO,** Department of Biomedical and Biotechnological Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
65. Venera **TOMASELLI,** Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Catania, Italy
66. Luca **ZANOLI,** Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Catania, Italy
67. Agata **ZAPPALÀ,** Department of Biomedical and Biotechnological Sciences, University of Catania, Italy

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