

Federal report calls for regulation of e-cigarettes

Electronic cigarettes could come under stringent federal regulations if Parliament accepts recommendations in a report from the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health.

The report, *Vaping: Towards a Regulatory Framework for E-cigarettes*, contains 14 recommendations based on testimonies from more than 30 experts and stakeholders.

If implemented, these recommendations will apply restrictions to labelling and advertising similar to those for tobacco products. It will also prohibit the sale of e-cigarettes to minors and vaping in federal public spaces. In addition, it will require disclosure of the ingredients these products contain and set a maximum level for nicotine.

“We are very pleased,” said Dr. Robert Strang, chief public health officer of Nova Scotia, the first province to legislate e-cigarettes by amending its Tobacco Act.

Strang’s department and the Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health hope that government “moves fast enough. This is an urgent matter.”

Health Canada says it will respond in “due course,” but did not provide a time frame.

Geneviève Bois, spokesperson for the Quebec Coalition for Tobacco Control, says the government could move “within the next few months before the next election.” The federal government “has been slow.”

She says new federal regulation would entice Quebec to regulate the product, although it should remain accessible to smokers “to reduce the harm they might suffer from their addiction. It should definitely not be a way to banalize nicotine addiction or nicotine use.”

In the United States, Dr. Wilson Compton, deputy director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, agrees that e-cigarettes could be useful for smokers who are trying to quit.

He is concerned though that non-smokers, particularly youth, who try the electronic cigarettes containing nicotine will develop an addiction.



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The report recommends restricting labelling and advertising, and prohibiting sales to minors.

The Canadian report, which was tabled before Parliament Mar. 10, also emphasizes the potential harm to youth and recommends a prohibition on sales to minors as well as the use of flavourings, such as candy, that are designed to attract youth.

The Electronic Cigarette Trade Association of Canada opposes restricting flavouring. Spokesperson Daniel David says, “Flavouring is not designed to attract the youth. The flavours are developed based on consumers’ demands.”

Health experts are also concerned that the ingredients in e-cigarettes are unknown. “We don’t know what is in these products and what they do to people’s health because we cannot study them due to the lack of regulation,” says Dr. Andrew Pipe, an expert in smoking cessation and chief of the Division of Prevention and Rehabilitation at the University of Ottawa Heart Institute.

“It has been very frustrating. It is a catch-22. On the one hand, the federal government says there is not enough evidence to regulate, and on the other we can’t study them because no one at Health Canada knows who can give permission to do the research,” says Pipe. He says the committee’s report should have conveyed the urgency to regulate by proposing a timeline.

From David’s perspective, however, it is better to take time to do it right than to rush things through. “If it was regulated improperly it could damage an industry that is trying to establish itself to offer a product that is vastly less harmful than the current cigarettes.” — Véronique Morin, Montréal, Que.

CMAJ 2015. DOI:10.1503/cmaj.109-5020