

Doing More Harm Than Good

Big Tobacco uses alternative nicotine products to drive addiction



The tobacco industry has a history of using a harm reduction narrative to sell new products and to mislead people into thinking they are offering safer choices for people who smoke. ^{1,2}

The industry makes these claims while continuing to sell and market deadly and addictive cigarettes. Nicotine pouches and heated tobacco products are the latest alternative nicotine products branded as harm reduction, but in the past, tobacco companies marketed cigarette filters, “light,” and “low-tar” cigarettes to reduce health concerns. However, the public later learned that these products led to increased harm and addiction. E-cigarettes have also been marketed as healthier alternatives, and these products created a youth vaping epidemic.^{3,4}



There are no safe tobacco or nicotine products, and instead of reducing harm, the industry’s goal is to expand their market and increase their profits.⁵

The tobacco industry promotes addiction by using the following tactics:

Twisting harm reduction language for their own agenda

- The tobacco industry is focused on addicting new users, keeping current users addicted, and selling as many products as they can. True harm reduction strategies prioritize decreasing addiction, preventing people from ever starting to use products, and protecting young people from targeted marketing.⁶
- Products like e-cigarettes and nicotine pouches can make quitting smoking more challenging by reinforcing nicotine addiction and lead individuals to dual use (using more than one product).^{7,8} Quitting completely is the only way to reduce harmful health impacts from tobacco product use.⁹
- The tobacco industry’s “harm reduction” claims lack clear evidence that alternative nicotine products are a safe and effective way of helping people quit cigarettes, or that they protect non-users from starting. Ultimately, the tobacco industry cannot be trusted to reduce harm, as their true focus remains increasing their profits.^{10,11}

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(Left to right) Nicotine pouches, e-cigarettes, and flavored liquid nicotine are among several products falsely marketed as “healthier” alternatives to cigarettes. Learn more at [TobaccoIsChanging.com](https://www.tobaccoischanging.com).

Downplaying the effects of nicotine

- The tobacco industry downplays the addictiveness and harmful health effects of nicotine.¹² Nicotine is addictive and negatively impacts young people’s brain development and mental health, and has a negative impact on heart health and the cardiovascular system.^{13,14,15} It can also harm oral health.¹⁶
- Nicotine is also being deceptively rebranded as a tool to help people focus and increase productivity, ignoring the potential for long-term addiction and harm.¹⁷

Marketing to young people and new users

- The tobacco industry advertises their devices as high-tech lifestyle products and promotes them through music, sports sponsorships, and celebrity endorsements.¹⁸
- The tobacco industry continues to use flavors, fully aware that they are extremely appealing to youth. Nearly all youth who use nicotine pouches and e-cigarettes use flavored products, including mint, wintergreen, menthol, and fruit flavors.¹⁹

Undermining and obstructing policy

- The tobacco industry consistently obstructs the implementation of evidence-based policies that would regulate their products and reduce tobacco-related disease and death.^{20,21} They also purposefully create products to evade existing regulations. For example, nicotine pouches are marketed to highlight that they can be used anywhere, including smoke-free places.²²



The U.S Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has not approved any e-cigarettes, nicotine pouches, or heated tobacco products as smoking cessation tools to help people quit smoking.^{23,24,25}

There are several nicotine replacement therapies (NRT) and medications that are approved as safe and effective by the FDA. Combined with counseling services, NRT gives people the best chances to quit.²⁶

Efforts to reduce tobacco use and tobacco-related disease cannot be led by the tobacco industry.²⁷

Instead, work should focus on proven public health strategies that **prevent use, help people quit** all tobacco and nicotine products, and **reduce appeal to youth and new users** through effective regulations on access, marketing, and flavors.²⁸

Endnotes

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