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Prevention, Control, and Reduction of Smoking



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Introduction

Smoking is one of the leading modifiable risk factors for human health. The World Health Organization estimates that more than 8 million people worldwide die each year because of active or passive smoking. Most of these deaths are the result of atherosclerotic cardiovascular diseases, lung cancer, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Despite numerous anti-smoking campaigns, the decline in the number of smokers has slowed in recent decades and has reached a plateau. The World Health Organization estimates that by 2025, one billion people worldwide will still be smoking, while the European Union, within the framework of the Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, has set a goal to reduce the proportion of smokers in the total population to 5% by the year 2040.

Considering all the above, AmCham aims to use this position paper to give a comprehensive overview of the current state of play in Croatia, analyze existing measures and policies, and propose concrete actions to ensure a faster and more effective response to this public health challenge.

Current state of play in Croatia

According to Eurostat from May 2022, data on smoking shows the following:

- **Daily smokers:** In 2019, 23.5% of people over the age of 15 in Croatia were daily smokers.
- **Differences between genders:** Men are more likely to be daily smokers compared to women.
- **Age groups:** The highest smoking rates were recorded in women aged 55 to 64.
- **Heavy smokers:** 11.6% of the population over the age of 15 consumed at least 20 cigarettes per day, with men more often being heavy smokers.
- **Exposure to tobacco smoke:** 34.7% of people over the age of 15 were exposed to tobacco smoke daily in indoor spaces, which is the highest proportion in the EU.

The Act on the Restriction of the Use of Tobacco and Related Products regulates the use of tobacco and nicotine products in Croatia. It complies with European directives and is sometimes stricter than EU regulations and many member states' laws. Considering it was adopted in 2017, it does not reflect the fact that the market for tobacco and related products has undergone certain changes, nor does it incorporate new findings.

Smoking prevention and cessation

Smoking prevention programs are essential for reducing smoking rates and improving public health. To reduce smoking rates in the future, it is especially important to prevent young people taking up smoking. Additionally, reducing smoking among adults, especially in the most vulnerable groups, decreases young people's exposure to smoking and their access to tobacco and nicotine products. One of the main approaches to smoking prevention is educational campaigns that inform the public about the harmful effects of smoking. School and community programs are aimed at educating young people about the harmful effects of smoking and promoting healthy lifestyle habits.

Successful smoking cessation requires a comprehensive approach that includes medical assistance, counseling, and lifestyle changes. Nicotine replacement therapy, medication, and support programs have proven effective in helping smokers overcome addiction, while some countries implement intensive and easily accessible programs.

On the other hand, research shows that the average smoker attempts to quit smoking at least six times, with many trying more than 30 times before successfully quitting (Chaiton et al, 2016). Therefore, it is realistic to expect that some smokers will continue to smoke despite all the implemented efforts, programs, and measures.

This underscores the importance of analyzing countries that have successfully reduced smoking rates within a relatively short timeframe and considering the adoption of effective practices not yet implemented locally. Smoking prevention and cessation programs have been in place for many years



and are implemented by various healthcare institutions. They include individual and group work with patients, counseling centers, and preventive lectures for students and parents.

Examples of good practice

One of them is the United Kingdom. In 2013, the smoking rate among adults in the UK was approximately 19%. Over the past decade, that rate has significantly decreased. As of 2023, around 11.9% of adults in the United Kingdom are smokers. The campaigns being implemented use various media, including television, radio, social media, and posters, to reach the widest possible audience.

The United Kingdom is also exploring innovative approaches in the fight against smoking. One such approach is the promotion of e-cigarettes as a less harmful alternative to traditional cigarettes. Although e-cigarettes are not without risk, research suggests that they are less harmful than smoking and can help smokers quit. Efforts are also being made to regulate the e-cigarette market to prevent their use among young people.

Stoptober ([*Stoptober is back, calling on smokers to quit for good: Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust*](#)) is an annual campaign held every October that encourages smokers to quit smoking for 28 days. Research shows that quitting smoking for 28 days increases the chances of quitting for good by five times. The campaign provides support through apps, social media, and local events, and includes expert advice as well as stories from former smokers.

Stop smoking services ([*NHS stop smoking services help you quit – NHS*](#)) is an initiative by the National Health Service (NHS), which provides resources and support for smoking cessation throughout the year. *Smokefree* offers free counseling services, nicotine replacement therapies, and medication that help smokers quit. In addition, apps and online tools are available to provide support and motivation.

Swap to Stop ([*Swap to Stop | Devon County Council Stop Smoking Service Provided by Best You*](#)) is an initiative that encourages smokers to switch from cigarettes to e-cigarettes as a less harmful alternative. Although e-cigarettes are not without risk, research suggests that they are less harmful than traditional cigarettes and can help smokers quit. This campaign includes the distribution of free e-cigarettes to smokers who want to quit smoking.

One of the more interesting smoking cessation apps comes from Germany and is called "[*NichtraucherHelden*](#)" (**Non-Smoking Heroes**). It is a comprehensive program that combines digital tools and behavioral therapy to help individuals quit smoking. The app offers personalized counseling, interactive exercises, and motivational content based on cognitive-behavioral therapy. The app has a free version that provides initial support, including counseling sessions, non-smoking statistics, and tools for managing cravings. There is also a full version available on prescription, making the entire program free for users with a prescription. The app also includes progress tracking with a cigarette counter, a savings calculator, and monitoring of health improvements, while users also have access to tools such as breathing exercises, games, and community support to help manage cravings. The full version of the app provides three months of active support after quitting smoking, including regular counseling videos, fitness tips, and healthy recipes to help prevent weight gain. The program is supported by experienced professionals, ensuring that users receive expert guidance throughout their entire smoking cessation journey.

When it comes to prevention, one example that marked its 10th anniversary last year is the "[*The Real Cost*](#)" campaign by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The campaign uses digital marketing tactics and creative advertising to educate the public about the negative consequences of smoking. Some of these marketing tactics include the following:

- Digital and streaming video advertising on platforms such as Hulu and YouTube.
- Streaming audio advertising on platforms such as Spotify and Pandora.
- Social media for audience engagement on platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram.
- Advertising focused on games through platforms such as Twitch and Xbox.
- Various influencers to spread the campaign's message.
- Since 2018, the campaign has expanded to raise awareness among minors about e-cigarettes and their impact on health.

New tobacco and nicotine products

Driven by consumer preferences and advancements in research and development of new technologies, smoke-free tobacco and nicotine products have been introduced to the market. The following are available on the Croatian market: e-cigarettes, heated tobacco products, heated herbal products, and nicotine pouches.

These products offer adult smokers a smoke-free alternative to conventional cigarettes and, while not risk-free, are considered less harmful than continued smoking, according to available research.

Nicotine, which is found in these products, while addictive and not without risk, is not the primary cause of the diseases linked to smoking. Many public health experts point out that the causes are the high levels of harmful and potentially harmful compounds in smoke. For example, the British NICE (*National Institute for Health and Care Excellence*) states that it is "primarily the toxic compounds and carcinogens in tobacco smoke – not nicotine – that cause illness and death."¹

The harm caused by smoking cigarettes arises from the process of combustion. Cigarettes burn tobacco at high temperatures, producing ash, tar, and smoke that contain high levels of harmful compounds. As opposed to cigarettes, new tobacco and nicotine products, due to the absence of combustion, do not produce tar, ash, or smoke, and the average levels of harmful and potentially harmful compounds emitted are significantly lower compared to cigarette smoke².

In addition to heated tobacco products and e-cigarettes, the use of nicotine pouches, which contain nicotine and are intended for oral use, has been increasing recently. According to Eurobarometer data, the prevalence of smoking in Sweden in 2020 was 7%, the lowest among the EU member states. More recent national data from Sweden show that the prevalence of smoking dropped to 5.8% in 2022³.

Tobacco use in Sweden is predominantly in the form of snus, which is less harmful than smoking cigarettes. That is why the risk of dying from lung cancer among Swedes is lower than in any other European country⁴.

Conclusions of independent bodies on new tobacco and nicotine products

E-cigarettes

The evaluation of available scientific evidence conducted in 2022 by the *Office for Health Improvements and Disparities* (formerly *Public Health England*) confirms the short- and medium-term positive effects of using e-cigarettes.

They concluded that, in the short and medium term, the use of e-cigarettes carries only a small fraction of the risk associated with smoking, and that exposure to harmful substances is significantly lower compared to smoking, as indicated by biomarkers linked to the risk of cancer, respiratory, and cardiovascular conditions⁵.

The 2022 Cochrane report also gives a positive assessment of e-cigarettes. One of the authors of the report states: "E-cigarettes do not burn tobacco, and as such, they do not expose users to the same complex mixture of chemical compounds that cause disease in people who smoke conventional cigarettes. E-cigarettes are not without risk and should not be used by people who do not smoke or who are not at risk of smoking. However, evidence shows that nicotine e-cigarettes carry only a small fraction of the risk associated with smoking. In our review, we found no evidence of significant harm caused by nicotine-containing e-cigarettes when used for smoking cessation. However, due to the small number of studies and the lack of data on the long-term use (longer than two years) of nicotine-containing e-cigarettes, questions remain about their long-term effects"⁶.

¹ <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/NG209/chapter/promoting-quitline>

² Clinical Pharmacology of Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS): Implications for Benefits and Risks in the Promotion of the Combusted Tobacco Endgame – PubMed

³ <https://smokefreeSweden.org/2024/08/20/437/>

⁴ www.healthline.com/health/snus-cancer and <https://snusforumet.se/en/eu-tobacco-mortality-snus-a-major-factor-behind-swedens-low-rates/>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nicotine-vaping-in-england-2022-evidence-update/nicotine-vaping-in-england-2022-evidence-update-summary>

⁶ <https://www.cochrane.org/news/latest-cochrane-review-finds-high-certainty-evidence-nicotine-e-cigarettes-are-more-effective>

Heated tobacco

In 2019, the FDA, through a scientific review process of peer-reviewed published literature and other sources, determined that the aerosol produced by a heated tobacco device contains fewer toxic harmful ingredients than cigarette smoke, and that many of the identified harmful and potentially harmful constituents are present at lower levels than in cigarette smoke. Following this conclusion, in 2020 the FDA issued a decision⁷ allowing one heated tobacco device to be marketed as a Modified Risk Tobacco Product (MRTP). This decision essentially means that the product can be marketed with the claim of reduced exposure to harmful and potentially harmful constituents. Such a product is expected to have a positive impact on public health.

Nicotine pouches

In 2025, FDA reviewed the scientific evidence and authorized the marketing of nicotine pouches. The FDA determined that nicotine pouches pose lower risk of cancer and other serious health conditions compared to cigarettes and most tobacco products intended for oral use. The FDA emphasized the importance of responsible marketing to prevent use among youth, noting that current data show low use of nicotine pouches among young people⁸.

The economic dimension and illegal products

The regulation of tobacco and tobacco and nicotine products should also be viewed through an economic lens, i.e. its impact on agriculture, the state budget, the economy, and employment. The value chain of the tobacco industry in Croatia includes agricultural production in Slavonia and Podravina, manufacturing at a factory in Istria, distribution, national kiosk chains, and logistics centers. An analysis of the economic contribution showed that more than 2,000 directly employed workers indirectly support over 7,000 additional jobs across Croatia in various sectors, including more than 400 farmers in Slavonia and Podravina. More than 85% of production is exported to 26 markets within the European Union. The state budget receives over one billion euros in revenue from excise duties and VAT on tobacco products.

A robust regulatory framework for tobacco is also important in the context of combating the illegal trade in tobacco and nicotine products. According to the KPMG Report⁹ on the consumption of illegal cigarettes in 2024, the share of illegal cigarettes in total cigarette consumption was 4.9%, representing an annual rise of 1.5 percentage points. According to an IPSOS survey presented in March 2025, the consumption of untaxed cut tobacco in 2024 decreased by 33.8% annually.

The tobacco product market is unique due to its stable demand, but any sudden change in price or product availability leads to illegal market growth, which is very difficult to bring back into legal channels later.

The illegal trade in tobacco and nicotine products carries a number of risks. In addition to negatively impacting the state budget, it has significant negative social and economic effects. Unlike legal products, illegal products are not subject to the same safety and health controls, they lack transparency regarding their composition, and are often produced and stored in unsanitary and unregulated conditions. Due to their affordability and methods of distribution, they can be more easily accessible to minors. Ultimately, illegal trade also contributes to the rise of crime in general, as proceeds from illegal trade are often used to finance other criminal activities such as human trafficking, drug trafficking, and even terrorism.

⁷ <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-permits-sale-iqos-tobacco-heating-system-through-premarket-tobacco-product-application-pathway>

⁸ FDA Authorizes Marketing of 20 ZYN Nicotine Pouch Products after Extensive Scientific Review

⁹ Illicit cigarette consumption in Europe, 11 June 2025

AmCham recommendations

In addition to regulation, Croatia implements a range of measures and programs aimed at preventing smoking and supporting cessation. However, the reach and availability of these programs are not sufficient to provide support to all smokers who want to quit, help those who have successfully managed to quit to prevent relapse, and to protect non-smokers. Preventing smoking initiation among minors is key to reducing future prevalence, while intensive public health initiatives that raise awareness of the harms of smoking and encourage cessation are essential to addressing this ongoing public health challenge.

In accordance with all the above, we propose the following recommendations for a faster and more effective response to this public health challenge.

- **National Strategy Against Smoking**

Adoption of a five-year national strategy against smoking, which will encompass all available scientific evidence and effective practices from other countries, with the goal of strengthening the fight against smoking and introducing targeted actions in this area.

- **Enhancing the support system for smokers**

By combining various offline and digital tools that help individuals successfully quit smoking, it is possible to improve the support system for smokers who want to quit. This includes:

- a) Digital cessation programs that offer personalized plans, educational resources, and community support for quitting smoking.*
- b) Mobile apps that provide tools for tracking progress, motivational messages, and quitting tips, as well as access to expert support during moments of crisis.*
- c) Social media campaigns for raising awareness, sharing success stories, and creating support groups for quitting smoking.*
- d) Text message programs sent daily to individuals enrolled in smoking cessation programs.*
- e) Online communities, forums, and support groups where users can share experiences, offer encouragement, and celebrate milestones in quitting smoking.*
- f) Support for quitting smoking at a local level, which is provided by trained counselors who offer personalized assistance. This can be done in various locations such as general practitioners' offices, pharmacies, or even mobile clinics.*

- **Improvement of prevention programs**

Improve digital programs and public prevention campaigns aimed at reducing the use of tobacco and nicotine products among minors and ensure stricter enforcement of legal provisions that prohibit the promotion and sale of these products to minors.

- **Improving the national legislative framework**

We propose enhancing and expanding the work of the National Committee for Combating Smoking. We believe that, due to the proposed broader scope of work, it should be established as the Committee on Tobacco and Related Products. In addition to its current responsibilities, the Committee should be tasked with proposing a national anti-smoking strategy to the Ministry, along with measures aimed at reducing the public health impact of tobacco and related products through prevention, promotion of smoking cessation, and harm reduction approaches. The Committee should also formulate national positions on tobacco-related issues to be represented at both European and international levels. Considering the financial, tax, and agricultural aspects of tobacco and tobacco and nicotine products in Croatia, we propose that, in addition to the current members, the Committee also includes representatives from the ministries responsible for finance, economy, and agriculture, as well as representatives of business associations.

Special attention should be given to the issue of prevention among minors. Although the ban on advertising tobacco and nicotine products and the prohibition of sales to minors are clearly defined, there is a growing trend of advertising through influencers on social media, who often serve as role models for minors. Emphasis should be placed on educating influencers, strengthening the capacity of inspection services, and implementing stricter penalties in this regard.

Definition and regulation of new tobacco and nicotine products (e.g. nicotine pouches, heated tobacco products) that are currently on the market or may appear in the future, based on the existing evidence and current global market practices. The absence of regulation in today's context of rapid

and constant technological development, as well as addressing new products solely through bans, results in an unregulated market, loss of state revenue, and greater overall social damage compared to balanced regulation.

The national legislative framework, as well as the five-year national anti-smoking strategy, should be built upon three pillars in the fight against smoking. Specifically, anti-smoking programs, which are currently based on the principles of smoking prevention and encouraging cessation, should be supplemented with the principle of harm reduction, particularly for smokers who do not intend to quit. The goal is to ensure that these smokers are informed about the existence of alternatives that, according to scientifically supported evidence, are less harmful than smoking and therefore pose less risk to both active and passive smokers. The principle of harm reduction should by no means be a substitute for smoking cessation measures, but rather serve as a complementary approach. The principle of harm reduction in the fight against smoking should be limited to smokers who continue to smoke, and who should still be encouraged to fully cease risky behaviors altogether. Smoking prevention measures should be particularly focused on young people. An increasing number of countries are recognizing the importance of extending the concept of harm reduction to the area of tobacco and nicotine products and its role, through an adequate regulatory and taxation framework, in reducing smoking prevalence. Sweden, Greece, the Czech Republic, and New Zealand are just some of the examples.

It is important to establish a clear distinction in approach between combustible tobacco products and smoke free tobacco and nicotine products, as well as to ensure reasonable freedom to inform smokers about alternative smoke free products. We believe that there should be a difference in the level of taxation, as well as distinct regulatory treatment for combustible tobacco products compared to smoke free tobacco and nicotine products (e.g. electronic cigarettes, heated tobacco products, and nicotine pouches), within the framework of measures aimed at reducing and limiting the use of tobacco and related products, by applying harm reduction principles. Likewise, adult smokers should have access to relevant information about new, less harmful products, in accordance with consumer protection regulations and with the aim of contributing to public health.

- **Encouraging research on the new generation of tobacco and nicotine products**

It is essential for research and health institutions to initiate more intensive studies on the new generation of tobacco and nicotine products. If conducting research at the local level is not possible, a systematic review of all available preclinical and clinical studies, both independent and those conducted by the tobacco industry, should be carried out. Some countries are already conducting such assessments of the available scientific evidence (e.g. USA, Greece, UK).

- **Introducing a new category in the Central Health Information System of the Republic of Croatia (CEZIH)**

We propose that, in addition to questions about the use of cigarettes, the Central Health Information System of the Republic of Croatia (CEZIH) include categories for new smoke free tobacco and nicotine products, such as heated tobacco, e-cigarettes, and nicotine pouches. This would provide a more comprehensive picture of the use of tobacco and nicotine products of the new generation. In parallel with the monitoring system through CEZIH, we also propose educating healthcare professionals about the scientific evidence related to new, smoke free, and less harmful tobacco and nicotine products, so that they can provide informed and quality advice to their patients.

- **Product compliance control**

Special attention should also be given to product compliance and quality control. It is essential to verify that all products available on the market have been duly registered through the EU-CEG system. The State Inspectorate should carry out random inspections to assess product quality and compliance with labelling requirements. Any identified non-compliance should be addressed in accordance with the provisions of the Act on General Use Items.



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