

European health organisations urge EU Member States to support the EU Commission’s proposal for smoke- and aerosol-free environments



Tobacco consumption remains a leading cause of preventable morbidity and mortality in the European Union, being attributable to many forms of cancer, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, and approximately 700,000 annual deaths. Novel products are also of particular concern as they cause inflammatory and irritative reactions. Second-hand smoke also contains nicotine as well as harmful chemicals. They have shown to impact respiratory and cardiovascular health. Novel products have been shown to be a gateway to tobacco use and are largely used alongside traditional tobacco products.

Recalling the objective to attain a “tobacco-free generation by 2040” under Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan, expanding the current recommendations to include outdoor smoke-free spaces and novel and emerging products is essential. It will help improve public health, reduce healthcare costs, and protect the environment across Europe.

The 2023 Eurobarometer report¹ found overwhelming public support among EU citizens for smoke- and aerosol-free environments, with over 80% of respondents in favour of the measure in some EU Member States. Despite the lack of consensus achieved by the European Parliament on 28 November, the outcome is clear: Members of the European

¹ European Commission. Attitudes of Europeans towards tobacco and electronic cigarettes. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2995>. Date last updated June 2024. Date last accessed November 19 2024

Parliament (MEPs) will not support a resolution influenced by tobacco and vaping industries influences to weaken the direction of the European Commission.

The signatories jointly call on the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council to adopt Recommendations 2024/0230 and its revised scope of settings and products, thus expanding the protection of the population to the harmful exposures to second-hand smoke.

By supporting these measures, the EU will lead the way to a tobacco-free generation and move closer to a healthier, more sustainable future for all its citizens. It is now time for the Council to take this pivotal, long-awaited step and help bring this vision to life.

Professor Filippos Filippidis, Chair of the European Respiratory Society (ERS) Tobacco Control Committee, said:

"Comprehensive smoke-free policies do work and help reduce morbidity and mortality in the population. It is essential that these recommendations are adopted across the EU to ensure health for all."

Dimitris Kontopidis, Chair of the European Lung Foundation (ELF), said:

"Smoke-free environments are important for protecting the health of everyone, especially those of us living with lung conditions who are more vulnerable to the harms of smoking and vaping. Supporting these recommendations would not only reduce immediate health risks but also help ensure that future generations are not exposed to these dangers. This is an important step in creating a healthier society for all and easing the strain on our healthcare systems."

Prof Hein Van Poppel, Chair of the European Association of Urology (EAU) Policy Office, said:

"With tobacco increasing the risk of urological cancers such as bladder and kidney cancer, the EAU is fully supportive of this policy approach towards a tobacco free generation, which we know is an effective one."

Cornel Radu Loghin, The European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention (ENSP) Secretary General, said:

*"The adoption of the recommendations is a critical opportunity for the EU to demonstrate its commitment to safeguarding the health of its citizens. It reflects the EU's responsibility under the **WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO-FCTC)** – the only global public health treaty – to protect present and future generations from the devastating consequences of tobacco consumption and exposure to tobacco smoke. Failing to adopt these recommendations, however, could undermine the credibility of the EU's health policies, reinforcing the perception that they are heavily influenced by the tobacco and vaping industries. Adoption of these measures is not just a matter of compliance with international obligations but a test of the EU's resolve to act decisively in the interest of public health over commercial pressures from the tobacco and vaping industries."*

Birgit Beger, CEO of European Heart Network (EHN), said:

"Smoking is the second largest cause of Cardiovascular Disease (CVD) after high blood pressure. Recent studies increasingly highlight the risks of electronic cigarette use to the cardiovascular system. We urge politicians to enable smoke- and aerosol-free environments for healthy hearts in Europe."

Professor Susanna Price, European Society of Cardiology (ESC) Advocacy Committee Chair, said:

"Scientific evidence unequivocally demonstrates that vaping poses significant health risks. To protect European children and adolescents from a potential epidemic of addiction, we are calling on policymakers to implement stringent regulations on e-cigarettes or consider banning them altogether."

Lilia Olefir, Director Smoke Free Partnership (SFP), said:

"Almost 80% of young people aged 15-24 reported encountering people smoking all kinds of tobacco products on outdoor terraces, according to the results of the 2023 Eurobarometer. The 2023 WHO report on the global tobacco epidemic clearly states that aerosols and emissions released by heated tobacco products and e-cigarettes do include toxicants and exposure to them poses risks to non-users. Hence, the debates around lack of scientific evidence are driven by the tobacco industry, which is desperately trying to confuse people with the only goal in mind - increasing the profit and finding new customers among children and young adults."

Raymond Vanholder, European Kidney Health Alliance (EKHA) President, said:

"Both active and passive smoking causes kidney insufficiency and accelerate the progression of kidney disease of whatever cause. Kidney disease currently being one of the most frequent, and socially expensive chronic diseases, European Kidney Health Alliance (EKHA) strongly supports a smoke- and aerosol-free environment."

Susanna Palkonen, Director of European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA), said:

"Second-hand smoking affects us all, without exceptions, but especially the most vulnerable. It's a key cause of death and disability from respiratory diseases, including asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). With this toll, patients need a protective framework to have their right to health enacted, with a future-proof, smoke-free paradigm protecting their lung health, with a view to a 'Tobacco-free Europe by 2040'."

Shira Zelber-Sagi, Public Health Councilor of the European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL), said:

"Tobacco use is strongly linked to liver disease, both through direct and indirect mechanisms. The harmful chemicals in tobacco smoke can cause inflammation, oxidative stress, and fibrosis in the liver, increasing the risk of chronic liver conditions, such as cirrhosis and liver cancer. Tobacco use is a major risk factor for liver cancer. Additionally,

smoking can worsen the progression of existing liver diseases, such as hepatitis, by impairing liver function and exacerbating viral damage. We are gravely concerned by the rise of new tobacco products in Europe, such as e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products. The availability and popularity of these products have led to an increase in tobacco consumption, particularly among younger populations, complicating efforts to reduce tobacco-related diseases. The role of commercial determinants of health, including aggressive marketing and lobbying by the tobacco industry, further amplifies the challenge. These new products may undermine decades of progress in tobacco control, further contributing to the growing burden of liver disease and other health issues across Europe.”