

***Statement by Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Integrated Centre on Smoking Cessation for Agenda V. Legislative proposal to regulate electronic cigarettes and other new tobacco products in the Panel on Health Services Meeting on Tuesday, 19 June 2018.**

Found in January 2009, Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Integrated Centre on Smoking Cessation (ICSC) is the first public funded Non-government organization to offer integrated and comprehensive smoking cessation service for Hong Kong people.

ICSC deeply acknowledges with the severe harmful impact of tobacco usage at individual, family and also community level. With the mission of advocating a smoke-free society and smoke-free new generation, we deliver evidence-based effective intervention in preventive work for the community and therapeutic treatment service for smokers who intend to quit smoking.

In the past 10 years, ICSC has its privilege in collaborative work with the Government agencies and members from community to combat against the tobacco epidemic. We witness the gradual decrease of smoking prevalence rate to reach 10.0% in 2017. Not long ago, ICSC joined the 35th Anniversary celebration of Tobacco Control in Hong Kong in December 2017. The participants from both government and community shareholders have a consensus of moving towards Tobacco Endgame in Hong Kong. We strive for reducing the HK smoking prevalence rate to a single-digit¹ in near future.

However, after few months, it is hard for us to believe that we are here for the discussion of legislation on sales of electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes), heat-not-burn tobacco products (heat-not-burn) and other new tobacco products. Once these products are allowed to be sale in Hong Kong, Hong Kong people is subject to their harmful impacts. ICSC would like to express our extreme disappointment on any legislative proposal that allow the sales of these tobacco products in Hong Kong.

The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control of World Health Organization (WHO-FCTC) have set the ground rule with scientific and evidence-based support. It serves the benchmark for Government's policies on Tobacco Control. As a collaborative partner with Tobacco

¹ Government Press Release: Government survey reveals reduction in smoking
(<http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201803/22/P2018032200255.htm?fontSize=1>)

Control Office, ICSC has its obligation to adhere closely with the international framework and local government policy.

In the recent published government paper, *Towards 2025: Strategy and Action Plan to Prevent and Control Non-communicable Diseases in Hong Kong*, it has restated the Government will implement strategy and action plan to, “discourage smoking”, “contain the proliferation of tobacco use”, and “protect the public from exposure to second-hand smoke as far as possible”². There is no proven safe level of tobacco use or of second-hand smoke exposure.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that WHO has already published a report to state that “there was currently insufficient evidence to conclude that e-cigarettes help users quit smoking”, “it poses threats to adolescents”, and “increase the exposure of non-smokers and bystanders to nicotine and a number of toxicants”³.

With such information, ICSC finds no reason to allow sales of the novel tobacco products in Hong Kong. We SUPPORT to have TOTAL Ban on sales of all tobacco products (Both ordinary cigarette or novel products).

From ICSC Frontline working experience, we note that people are provided with incorrect and misleading marketing information. These information are disseminated via internet, leaflets/flyers distributed by sales with fake claim that “e-cigarettes, heat-not-burn or other new forms of tobacco products is an easy way to quit smoking/ not harmful to your lung”. People share these products to others as a gift as they faithfully believe that these novel tobacco products are “less toxic”, safe for use and draw no health impact. Some people even approach our frontline workers and inquire for sales of these “smoking machine” to facilitate their quit intent.

It is SAD to find that people faithfully believe that they are quitting smoking when they shift to use e-cigarettes and/or heat-not-burn tobacco products. Therefore they do not to seek

² Towards 2025: Strategy and Action Plan to Prevent and Control Non-communicable Diseases in Hong Kong - Target 5 - Reduce tobacco use (https://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/saptowards2025_fullreport_target5_en.pdf)

³ Backgrounder on WHO report on regulation of e-cigarettes and similar products (<http://www.who.int/nmh/events/2014/backgrounder-e-cigarettes/en/>)

professional advice as they are using “safe” device(s).

Therefore, our observation reflected that smoker would have great chance to defer their use of effective evidence-based smoking cessation treatment when these novel tobacco products are easily accessible in the market. The more delay in treatment for nicotine dependence, the more risk imposed onto personal health and social cost on health burden.

ICSC would like to express our appreciation for the government strong and dedicated determination in containing “the proliferation of tobacco use” in past decades. What is the Tigger factor that make us get a REVERSE Direction? Apart from strict banning, any form of legislation for sales of these tobacco products would ruin our decades and years of work in tobacco control.

Furthermore, we would like to express our serious concern about the impacts of new tobacco products like e-cigarettes and/or heat-not-burn on Hong Kong young people. These novel products have their gimmick of fashionable. Youngsters are easily attracted by fascinated advertising strategies with different types of model/brand or a wide range of favours.

Our concern and worry is not exaggerated. The fact reported in Census and Statistics Department - *Thematic Household Survey Report No. 64 on Pattern of Smoking*⁴, published in March 2018. In School-based survey on smoking among students in 2016/17 which conducted by the School of Public Health of the University of Hong Kong. It was found that students who have ever used e-cigarette have a reported rate of 1.4% and 8.7%, among primary 1 to 4 students and secondary school students respectively. It is worth addressing that the survey has found quite a number of primary and secondary school students who have never smoked before have ever tried e-cigarette. The rate of primary 1 to 4 students is around 1% while that of secondary school students is 3.5%.

While we are shocked by the number of students who have ever or currently use e-cigarette, please be mindful that, during the time that the survey conducted, e-cigarette is not allow for sale in Hong Kong. The mimic puffing behaviour in teenage helps to create a new consumer

⁴ Census and Statistics Department: Thematic Household Survey Report No. 64 on Pattern of Smoking (<https://www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp140.jsp?productCode=B1130201>)

population for tobacco companies. What would happen if e-cigarettes, heat-not-burn or other new tobacco products would be allowed to sales legally in Hong Kong? How easily be local young people be accessible to tobacco products in places of public entertainment, household context or retail stores? Why would we be so lenient with the tobacco products? Why would we choose to put risk on young people's exposure to tobacco products instead of banning these tobacco products from getting into Hong Kong?

Being a community-based and frontline service provider in field of Tobacco Control in Hong Kong, ICSC are determined to fight against all kinds and all forms of tobacco products in getting into Hong Kong's market. We are unswerving to defend for Tobacco Control achievement as we understand how hard it takes in the past 35 years' effort. We have to stand firm to Tobacco epidemic and it must not be manoeuvred. Our ultimate goal is to facilitate the Tobacco Endgame in Hong Kong with Ultimate Total Ban of all tobacco products in the territory so as to protect the health of people in Hong Kong and our next generation.

(*English version is for reference only. Please refer to the Chinese statement for full details.)