



Call to Block Vaping Bill Misses the Mark: Youth Protections Are Needed Now

On July 2nd, 2020, 35 Doctors requested that the Lieutenant Governor block the democratic process and withhold royal assent on **Bill 19 the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Act Amendment 2020** despite the overwhelming approval of Alberta's elected representatives.

This Bill, when implemented would finally restrict nicotine vaping product sales to youth, prohibit advertising visible to young people and impose fines for the selling of vape products to minors. Taken together, these important steps will help ensure that minors cannot get their hands on vaping products, while also ensuring that these same products remain available to adult smokers.

Most impressively the provincial government was able to move these vitally important legislative items forward during a time of unprecedented crisis – the COVID-19 Pandemic - which has deeply disrupted the lives of Albertans and the Alberta healthcare system.

Criticism from some advocacy groups has been focussed on the fact that the Bill will allow for the continuance of flavoured vape products. This is despite the fact that anecdotal evidence from thousands of Albertans who wrote to government to tell their personal stories as well as a range of studies from prestigious institutions such as Oxford University have indicated that flavours are a key tool in helping smokers transition to vaping when traditional smoking cessation methods fail.

We believe that in no case should flavours be marketed to appeal to youth and thankfully federal restrictions are already in place to ensure that these are not legally available. Flavour names such as "Rainbow Unicorn Horn" are already restricted under the federal framework and when combined with proper enforcement under a regulated sales regime - which Bill 19 finally gives us – we will have a fulsome mechanism in place to ensure vaping products are only available to adults and that there is no legal appeal to youth.

To be very clear, VITA does not claim that vaping is harm free, but it should be remembered that for 6 years Public Health England has published the message that vaping is 95% less harmful than combustible tobacco. They have done this because they want to reduce harm and know that for the millions upon millions of people who still smoke around the world, simply telling them to quit may not be enough.

They are not alone in this opinion, The American Cancer Society has stated that “E-cigarette use is likely to be significantly less harmful for adults than smoking regular cigarettes”, and the National Heart and Lung Institute of the Imperial College in London has stated that “Smokers who switch completely to vaping will gain a significant health benefit”.

Few Albertans believe combustible tobacco is harmless; yet 780,000 still smoke. It would be irresponsible to deny these adults a consumption method that may be significantly less harmful than combustion: Moreover it would be supremely irresponsible to allow for the selling of nicotine vaping products to youth for months or years because you disagree with one element of the bill or another.

We cannot wait this long. We need to ensure that we restrict nicotine vaping products to adults only now - not some point in the future.

Alberta is the last province in Canada to make the selling of nicotine vape products to minors illegal. Had the Lieutenant Governor refused to provide Royal Assent, it would have likely lead to significant delays and force the re-introduction of legislation at some point very far down the road. This is not good health policy, it is not good social policy – in fact it makes very little sense at all.

Instead we think that we should ban the selling of nicotine vapes to minors now and work through the already established federal system to make sure that no flavours are promoted in the market in a manner that could appeal to youth. This would result in an almost immediate and positive significant step towards combating youth vaping.

Thankfully the Lieutenant Governor provided her signature to Bill 19. She understood That there was absolutely no reason to delay good health policy such as this Bill – However there are 780,000 reasons for her to do it immediately.

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