



*Saving Lives One  
Smoker At A Time!*

May 7, 2021

**Yes to prevention funding - No to increased e-cig taxes!**

Dear Chair Nelson, Chair Marquart, and members of the Tax Conference Committee:

We are writing to you today in support of continued funding for tobacco prevention and cessation programs. ClearWayMN has been a valuable resource to help Minnesotans stop smoking and for others to never start. As long as combustible cigarettes remain on the market, the work that was done by ClearWay continues to be needed.

After the amazing work done by ClearWay and others, Minnesota continues to have a group of people who smoke who can't or won't stop smoking. Low income, lower levels of education, mentally ill, LGBTQ, and POC have higher rates of smoking than their higher income and college educated white neighbors. This is a public health inequity we must continue to address.

We know people smoke for the nicotine and die from the tar. Science has been working hard the last few years to understand why people smoke for nicotine. Being an "addictive substance" does not give us a clear picture of what else is involved. There are many additives in combustible cigarettes that make them more addicting than other forms of nicotine. There is very little concern about [Nicotine Replacement Therapies](#) (NRTs) having a risk of addiction (patches, gum, lozenges, etc.). The same nicotine used in NRTs is the nicotine used in vapor products.

What science has discovered is that nicotine helps some people. It can help them with [cognitive](#) issues, with [mood modulation](#), and with their ability to [focus](#). Some people get pleasure from nicotine. Just like members of our society might enjoy a cold drink to relax after work, some people enjoy the use of nicotine. Nicotine has even helped some people with [seizure](#) disorders, [Tourette's syndrome](#), and is being studied to help slow the progression of [Alzheimer's Disease](#)!

1300 Americans are going to die today from smoking related causes. Some of those deaths will happen while you debate the tax bill. Vapor technology has been the life line for some smokers in MN and around the world. For those who have failed to stop smoking via more traditional methods, thousands in our state have finally kicked the smoking habit thanks for vapor products.

Minnesota taxes the vapor products containing nicotine at 95% wholesale, and there is sales tax on all vapor products. If we are going to help more Minnesotans stop smoking (the most dangerous way to use nicotine), we must keep those products affordable and not add another regressive tax on those who can afford it the least. A study [E-Cigarettes and Adult Smoking: Evidence from Minnesota](#) found that due to our 95% wholesale tax on nicotine vapor products during the sample period about 32,400 additional adult smokers would have quit smoking in Minnesota in the absence of the tax. That is 32,400 less of our families, friends, and neighbors who could have eliminated their risk of death by smoking if the tax wouldn't have deterred them from using vapor products to stop smoking!!!

We have some youth experimenting with age restricted products such as cigarettes, cigars, alcohol, and vapor products. We need to do a better job of enforcing current laws. A tax on the product that is helping people quit the deadly habit of smoking is not the solution to the problem, it only hurts our low income, special needs, and marginalized communities who need a hand to stop smoking. This is why we need to continue to fund our much needed tobacco programs and NOT tax tobacco harm reduction products like vapor technology. Such a tax will send people to WI, IA, ND, and SD as none of our border states have this type of tax on vapor products. The 40% wholesale tax in Pennsylvania led to the closer of over 100 small businesses. The Mom and Pop vape shops who don't sell products from big tobacco. MN is home to several small business that manufacture and sell vapor products.

Thank-you for your time!

Kim Murray

Tobacco Harm Reduction Specialist - Minnesota Smoke Free Alliance

*Mn Smoke Free Alliance is a grassroots group comprised of people who used to smoke. Our members work to educate others on the dangers of smoking, help people who smoke find a way to stop smoking that works for them, while preventing youth uptake of any age restricted products. We are completely self funded.*

[More on therapeutic benefits of nicotine can be found here.](#)

[Learn more about why we use the word "epidemic" when referring to teen use of vapor products here.](#)