

## Electronic Cigarettes: Public Health Position Statement

### *Context*

Smoking still matters to Camden and Islington because it remains the single biggest preventable risk factor of poor health, disability and premature death and the biggest cause of health inequalities in both boroughs. Camden and Islington Public Health is committed to helping people stop their tobacco use, with evidence based stop smoking support and quitting aids<sup>1</sup>.

The emergence of electronic cigarettes (ECs) and their increasing popularity is believed to be a contributory factor in the reduced numbers of smokers accessing NHS stop smoking services in the last three years. In 2014-15 450,582 people set a quit date with Stop Smoking Services in England, which is down by 45% compared to 2011-12<sup>2</sup>. Currently, approximately 5% of the UK population report using ECs, the vast majority of these smokers or recent ex-smokers. ECs have become the most popular quitting aid used by smokers<sup>3</sup>.

### *What are electronic cigarettes (ECs)?*

Nicotine Containing Products (NCPs) marketed as 'electronic cigarettes' (ECs), 'e-shisha' or 'shisha sticks or pens' are currently the subject of research and debate, particularly regarding their regulation and safety, use in enclosed public spaces and use for smoking cessation.

The increasing popularity of ECs and use in public spaces has caused concern because of the potential to re-introduce smoking behaviours in smokefree environments. However, there is no current evidence in England that ECs are re-normalising smoking or increasing smoking uptake in young people. There are concerns that ECs create a nuisance when used in enclosed public spaces, for example, as a result of their smell.

### *What are some of the ethical issues surrounding ECs?*

To date, the only EC licensed as a medicine in the UK has been manufactured by a tobacco company. Local authorities and stop smoking services have expressed concern about ensuring that their policies with respect to licensed medicines are consistent with their obligations within the Local Government Declaration on Tobacco Control and Article 5.3<sup>4</sup> of the World Health Organisation Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) to which the UK is a party.

Guidance from two well-respected organisations, the National Centre for Smoking Cessation and Training (NCSCT) and Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) recommend that the decision over whether an individual should be prescribed or recommended any medicine shown to be effective should be based on professional assessment of the need and potential benefit. If it is

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<sup>1</sup> Smokefree Camden & Islington Strategy 2016-2021. Available from: <http://www.islington.gov.uk/services/social-care-health/health-in-islington/Pages/publichealthservices.aspx?extra=7>

<sup>2</sup> Health & Social Care Information Centre 2015. Statistics on NHS Stop Smoking Services in England - April 2014 to March 2015 [Online]. Available from <http://www.hscic.gov.uk/catalogue/PUB18002/stat-stop-smok-serv-eng-2015-q4-rep.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Smoking Toolkit Study 2015 [Online]. Available from <http://www.smokinginengland.info/latest-statistics/>

<sup>4</sup> Article 5.3 of the FCTC requires that "in setting and implementing their public health policies with respect to tobacco control, Parties shall act to protect these policies from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry in accordance with national law".

believed that a particular product might be a cost-effective way of improving the chances of a smoker quitting there is no reason not to prescribe or recommend the product just because it is manufactured or distributed by an organisation owned by a tobacco company<sup>5</sup>.

#### *How are ECs regulated?*

Under the current regulatory framework, individual EC products vary considerably in quality and specification. They are currently subject to regulations relating to general product safety, but there has been criticism of the quality of some devices, and the accuracy of labelling of cartridges and e-liquids. NHS staff have been alerted in particular to the fire hazards when ECs are used or re-charged<sup>6</sup>.

From 20th May 2016, ECs will come under the revised EU Tobacco Products Directive, except where therapeutic claims are made or they contain over 20 mg/ml of nicotine, when they will require medicines authorisation. In the UK, the Medical Healthcare Regulatory Agency (MHRA) can regulate nicotine products as medicines. Following the introduction of the Tobacco Products Directive, ECs which are not licensed under MHRA will be more strictly regulated, including improved safety and quality requirements, such as child/ tamper proof packaging for e-liquids, and new packaging and labelling requirements.

An EC has been licensed as a medicine by the MHRA in late 2015, opening the way for this product to become available on prescription in the UK. However, the licensed EC is not likely to become available on the market for several months.

#### *What is the national guidance on the use of ECs to aid smoking cessation/harm reduction?*

NICE guidance on Harm Reduction (July 2015) indicates that nicotine containing products (NCPs) should be recommended to people who are unwilling or unable to stop smoking. It also acknowledges that some NCPs are not regulated by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), so their effectiveness, safety and quality cannot be assured, but that these products are likely to be less harmful than cigarettes.

A Public Health England (PHE) report on ECs, published in August 2015, updated and expanded on the evidence available and implications for public health. Based on the available evidence, PHE concluded that ECs have the potential to help smokers quit and, although they are not risk free, they carry a fraction of the risk of smoking tobacco.

#### *Updated Position Statement from Camden and Islington Department of Public Health*

The statement below is a review of the 2014 Camden and Islington Public Health position statement, in line with the new evidence reported by PHE. This updated statement is endorsed by the Community Stop Smoking Services operating in both Camden and Islington and by Camden and Islington Public Health.

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<sup>5</sup> Letter from National Centre for Smoking Cessation and Training (NCSCT) and Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) – 5 Feb 15. Available from: [http://www.ash.org.uk/files/documents/ASH\\_951.pdf](http://www.ash.org.uk/files/documents/ASH_951.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> NHS Central Alerting System, Estates and Facilities Alert 2014. Additional information for Mental Health Units with regards to EFA/2014/002: E-cigarettes, batteries and chargers. Available from: <https://www.cas.dh.gov.uk/ViewandAcknowledgment/ViewAlert.aspx?AlertID=102190>

## Position of Camden and Islington Department of Public Health

### 1) On the use, safety and effectiveness of electronic cigarettes to aid smoking cessation:

Recent evidence shows that ECs can help people to quit smoking and reduce their cigarette consumption. Experts currently estimate that using ECs is considerably safer than smoking tobacco cigarettes. Thus, ECs have great potential to help people who want to quit but who have not been successful using other methods. This may help reduce the burden of smoking related disease, death and inequalities.

Smokers should still be offered a referral to the specialist smoking cessation service for behavioural support to reduce their nicotine dependency, which could also include the use of licensed treatments such as nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) and other medicines used to quit smoking. The stop smoking services in Camden and Islington are actively supporting smokers who choose to use ECs as part of their quit attempt, with behavioural support and advice on licensed medications. Stop smoking specialists should be informed of up-to-date guidance on ECs as soon as it becomes available<sup>7</sup>. Smokers who wish to use an EC as an aid to quit smoking should seek support from their local stop smoking service, to have the best chances of quitting.

Camden and Islington Stop Smoking Service

T 020 3633 2609 SMS Quit to 66777

E [camdenandislington.stopsmokingservice@nhs.net](mailto:camdenandislington.stopsmokingservice@nhs.net)

W [www.smokefreelifecamdenandislington.co.uk](http://www.smokefreelifecamdenandislington.co.uk)

### 2) On the use of electronic cigarettes in enclosed public environments:

Electronic cigarettes are not covered by the Smoke Free legislation which prohibits smoking in enclosed public places. However, Public Health supports the inclusion of ECs in smoke free policies in order to restrict or prohibit their use, *except* in certain settings, such as mental health inpatient facilities or prisons (where there may be very high rates of smoking and limited access to outside space). This exclusion is based on assessing the risks for certain population groups of tobacco-related harm and relapse of smoking cessation weighed against the risks of re-normalising smoking and EC-related nuisance, but should be re-assessed within individual settings.

### 3) On the prescribing of electronic cigarettes

Prescribing of ECs is *not* recommended until further assessments have been made regarding safety, efficacy and cost effective analysis. Practitioners should emphasise that with support

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<sup>7</sup> For example: McEwen A, McRobbie H. Electronic cigarettes: A briefing for stop smoking services. National Centre for Smoking Cessation and Training. 2016. Available from: [http://www.ncsct.co.uk/publication\\_electronic\\_cigarette\\_briefing.php](http://www.ncsct.co.uk/publication_electronic_cigarette_briefing.php)

available from local Stop Smoking Services (behavioural support combined with medication) smokers are up to four times more likely to succeed than if they try to quit unaided<sup>8</sup>.

Public Health will continue to promote evidence-based interventions.

### **Additional Information**

The 2015 Public Health England report is available to download from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/e-cigarettes-an-evidence-update>

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*Service information updated in May 2017*

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<sup>8</sup> West, R. (2012) Stop smoking services: increased chances of quitting. NCSCT Briefing #8. London; National Centre for Smoking Cessation and Training. Available from:  
<http://www.ncsct.co.uk/usr/pub/Briefing%208.pdf>