



HARAP

Harm Reduction Alliance of the Philippines
<http://harap.ph>

31 January 2022

PRESIDENT RODRIGO R. DUTERTE

Republic of the Philippines
Malacañan Palace
Manila

Through: **Atty. SALVADOR C. MEDIALDEA**
Executive Secretary

Dear President Duterte,

We write to express our strong support for the passage of Senate Bill 2239 and House Bill 9007 (also known as the Vape Bill), under which "the government shall regulate the importation, manufacture, sale, packaging, distribution, use, advertisement, promotion and sponsorship of Vaporized Nicotine Products (VNPs)." If this bill is enacted into law, it will be a big win for public health as it will become the country's first comprehensive regulatory law for vape products. We also hope that the passage of the Vape Bill will end once and for all on the sale of smuggled and unregulated vapor products in the country.

The **Harm Reduction Alliance of the Philippines (HARAP)**, comprised of Filipino doctors, academicians, and scientists from the medical community, was founded in 2018 to advance the understanding of harm reduction policies in promoting public health, which includes Tobacco Harm Reduction. We take pride in the scientific work we have done on vapor products to date, which includes the following:

HARAP is the first scientific group in the country that has conducted a clinical study on the effects of vapor products in the human body. The study concluded that vapor products produce less heavy metals like lead and cadmium than cigarettes.

HARAP has also been invited as a subject matter expert and has appeared before the House of Representatives and the Senate to share their inputs in support of House Bill 9007 and Senate Bill 2239.

HARAP has participated and presented as a subject matter expert in various international scientific events on vapor products, where the latest scientific findings on these products are shared.

Having done much scientific work and research on vapor products, allow us to share our scientific opinion and findings briefly on this. Firstly, vapor products are meant as alternatives for the 16 million Filipino smokers who cannot stop smoking. In fact, in the United Kingdom, the government has included vapor products in the list of smoking cessation tools to convince people to stop smoking. Public Health England, the counterpart of our Department of Health, has consistently said that vaping is a gateway out of smoking.¹

There is also no dispute that vapor products are less harmful than cigarettes. No less than the representative of the World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed this scientific view during the hearing on HB 9007 in Congress. Furthermore, the vapor released when someone uses these products

contain far less harmful chemicals compared to cigarette smoke, as confirmed by many scientific studies around the world, including the latest report by the WHO published last May 2021.²

Vapor products are never intended for use by minors or nonsmokers. Therefore, it is good to see that the Vape Bill protects minors by banning the sale of these products to this specific population group. We also support banning the sale of vapor products within 100 meters from schools and playgrounds and the use of flavor descriptors that unduly appeal, particularly to minors.

Some sectors in the medical and scientific community, which are not familiar with the science behind vapor products, have expressed concerns about many uncertainties that vapor products may bring to society. For example, some doctors claim that vapor products cause E-cigarette or Vaping Product Use Associated Lung Injury (or EVALI). To clarify, there has been **no confirmed case of EVALI in the Philippines** as of this date as the records of the DOH will show. While there was one suspected case of EVALI reported back on November 15, 2019, the DOH immediately clarified the next day that the same was not a result of EVALI.³⁻⁴

Furthermore, there have been allegations that vaping leads to severe COVID-19 cases. This, however, is not supported by any scientific studies and is a mere hasty generalization. The association (or the lack thereof) between vapor products and COVID-19 progression has been used and abused by groups opposing the passage of the Vape Bill. However, public health entities like the WHO and the **US Food and Drug Administration have highlighted that there is no concrete evidence that establishes a direct link between these products and the diagnosis of COVID-19.**⁵

In fact, last May 21, 2021, the Mayo Clinic published a study entitled "Electronic Cigarette Use Is Not Associated with COVID-19 Diagnosis," which boasted a large sample of nearly 70,000 patients. **The study did not find any association between vaping and COVID-19. There is no sufficient evidence suggesting that people who vape are more likely to be diagnosed with the disease.**⁶

The scientific views we provided herein lead to only one conclusion: allowing vapor products will benefit society as a whole as it will end the country's smoking epidemic.


Mr. President, the Vape Bill will save the lives of 16 million Filipino smokers who want to stop smoking. Comprehensive regulation (and not prohibition) of vape products is vital to encourage smokers to stop smoking. The Vape Bill is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that can stamp out smoking once and for all.

We at HARAP will continue to champion harm reduction & public health and look forward to your signing and passing the Vape Bill.

Yours Truly,



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¹Vaping in England 2021 evidence update summary: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vaping-in-england-evidence-update-february-2021/vaping-in-england-2021-evidence-update-summary>

²WHO Report on the global tobacco epidemic 2021 <https://apps.who.int/iris/rest/bitstreams/1359088/retrieve>

³abs-cbn.com, Philippines confirms first case of vape-related illness, November 15, 2019, Philippines confirms first case of vape-related illness | ABS-CBN News

⁴abs-cbn.com, Findings on PH's first vaping-related injury 'not conclusive,' DOH chief Duque says, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/11/16/19/findings-on-phs-first-vaping-related-injury-not-conclusive-doh-chief-duque-says>

⁵FDA Center for Tobacco Products: Programmatic Updates and Activities, February 24, 2021, https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.srnt.org/resource/resmgr/conferences/2021_annual_meeting/fdaspecialsessioncombined030.pdf

⁶Electronic Cigarette Use Is Not Associated with COVID-19 Diagnosis, May 21, 2021, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/21501327211024391>