

# Is the European Commission about to crack down on an effective method to quit smoking?

*Christopher Snowden, Head of Lifestyle Economics at the Institute of Economic Affairs, examines a recent EU report on vaping. While vaping is being embraced by the NHS as an effective method to help smokers give up cigarettes, the EU's SCHEER committee report takes a prohibitionist approach which could deprive smokers of a proven means to quit.*

*This article was originally published by Brussels Report, and is reproduced with the kind permission of its editor and the author.*

At the end of last month, the EU's Scientific Committee on Health, Environmental and Emerging Risks (SCHEER) published its opinion on electronic cigarettes. Its findings could give the green light to further attempts by the European Commission to stamp out **vaping**. This contrasts with Britain's National Health Service at the same time announcing plans to offer free e-cigarettes to smokers in emergency departments.

When SCHEER's preliminary opinion was published last September, many experts were surprised by the negative tone.

**Hypothetical risks were amplified while stronger evidence showing the benefits of e-cigarettes in smoking cessation was downplayed. Similar evidence reviews from agencies such as Public Health England and the U.S. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine have drawn from a wider evidence base and given a more balanced assessment.**

In response to criticism, the EU's SCHEER committee has modified its position somewhat. It has downgraded its interpretation of the evidence that e-cigarettes are a gateway to smoking and are a risk factor for cardiovascular problems from strong to moderate, but it maintains that passive vaping is a plausible health risk and concludes that electronic cigarettes should only be considered to support smoking cessation for a limited time and under supervision.

**With this recommendation, SCHEER goes beyond its remit of assessing the effects of vaping on the human body and embroils itself in policy.**

## **The EU's SCHEER Committee downplays how vaping helps people to quit smoking**

In science, the strongest evidence comes from randomised controlled trials (RCTs). Several RCTs have shown that smokers are significantly more likely to quit if they switch to vaping, but SCHEER gives them short shrift.

More evidence



benefits from the invention of a vastly safer nicotine delivery device at all.

## **The European Commission may ban flavours in vaping products, which would remove a means for smokers to quit tobacco**

This is a worry for consumers because the SCHEER report is designed to alert the European Commission to the potential need for legislative amendments to the Tobacco Products Directive.

It wanted to regulate e-cigarettes as medical devices in the last Tobacco Products Directive, which came into force in 2016. Its plans were derailed by the European Parliament, but it may soon try again. **The European Commission seems particularly interested in banning flavours in e-cigarette products, a policy copied from American prohibitionists which would make vaping much less appealing to smokers who are thinking of switching to a product that could save their lives.**

In reality, **the SCHEER report does not compel the Commission to do anything.** The only evidence for health risks which the SCHEER report rates as strong in the final opinion relates to poisoning and injuries due to burns and explosions. These hazards have already been dealt with in the existing Tobacco Products Directive and do not require further legislation.

However, while the report does not explicitly call for any new laws, it gives the European Commission ammunition if it wishes to table some. As the evidence that e-cigarettes are relatively harmless and effective smoking cessation devices continues to grow, the SCHEER report will be used as a crutch for those who continue to lobby against them.