24 August 2022

Tangi Utikere
Chair, Health Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

By email to: Health@parliament.govt.nz

Tēnā koe

Re: Smokefree Environments and Regulated Products (Smoked Tobacco) Amendment Bill

On behalf of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP), we would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the Smokefree Environments and Regulated Products (Smoked Tobacco) Amendment Bill (the Bill). The RANZCP commends the key ambition of the Bill, to work towards a Smokefree Aotearoa.

About the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists

The RANZCP is a membership organisation that prepares doctors to be medical specialists in the field of psychiatry, supports and enhances clinical practice, advocates for people affected by mental illness and advises the government on mental health care.

This submission has been developed in consultation with the New Zealand Faculty of Addiction Psychiatry (FAP) Committee, New Zealand Faculty of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Committee and Tu Te Akaaka Roa – New Zealand National Committee.

Background

Previous measures to reduce smoking rates have focused on changing individual behaviour and generally have not benefitted marginalised groups and people experiencing economic deprivation.¹ This includes people living with serious mental health issues, who are reported to have higher rates of smoking than the general population.² Rates among Māori also remain relatively high, although are decreasing.³ These groups need to be prioritised to achieve the Government’s goal of less than 5% smoking among all populations by 2025.

The RANZCP supports legislative change that targets the supply of tobacco products and makes them less addictive and appealing. We also note the importance of continuing to ensure access to specialised smoking cessation support for priority populations.

Key amendments in the Bill

Reducing retail availability

The RANZCP supports the provisions that allow for limiting the number of retailers that can sell smoked tobacco products, as a way of reducing availability of these products. Evidence suggests this is likely to result in higher cessation rates and support people to switch to less harmful alternatives.⁴
Amending the age limits for sale of smoked tobacco products

The RANZCP supports the introduction of a Smokefree generation policy, as a mechanism likely to reduce the number of young people and successive generations taking up smoking. It will also be important to monitor vaping use among young people and consider measures to prevent potential harm from these products.

Reducing the appeal and addictiveness of smoked tobacco products

Nicotine is highly addictive and nicotine dependence is associated with morbidities and mortalities across both physical and mental health dimensions. The RANZCP supports the provisions that will enable setting limits on nicotine levels in smoked tobacco products, as this is shown to help to reduce addiction and support people with smoking cessation (including people with anxiety and mood disorders).

Regulation of vaping products

The RANZCP supports the use of vaping as a smoking cessation tool where it is effective for people. Vaping is less harmful than smoking and does not necessarily seem to be a ‘gateway’ to smoking. However, vaping nicotine products are highly addictive and not without harm.

We recommend the Bill introduce stronger regulations to restrict vaping products. For example, we note that section 33 of the Act allows for free distribution of vaping products. This could be used to attract more people to vaping who would not otherwise take it up.

We are also particularly concerned about high rates of uptake among young people. Although it is prohibited to sell vaping products to anyone under 18 years, marketing has targeted this group and young people have still been able to access to these products. All efforts should be made to minimise this. For example, consideration could be given to introducing limits on the proximity of vaping retailers to schools.

If you have any questions about this letter, please contact the RANZCP New Zealand National Manager, Jane Renwick. Jane can be contacted by phone at (04) 4830 718 or email jane.renwick@ranzcp.org.

Nā māua noa, nā

Dr Giles Newtown-Howes
Chair, New Zealand Faculty of Addiction Psychiatry Committee

A/Prof Susanna Every-Palmer
Chair, Tu Te Akaaka Roa - New Zealand National Committee
References

6 Removing the nicotine from tobacco: The key component of the current Smokefree Bill – Public Health Expert, University of Otago, New Zealand. 2022.