



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Press Statement

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Protecting youth from industry manipulation and preventing them from tobacco and nicotine use

In conjunction to the World No Tobacco Day which falls on 31st May, the Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) joins the community of public health advocates to urge the Malaysian government to protect the youth from the tobacco industry's manipulation.

The industry's hidden agenda is to entice the youth because, once a person is addicted to nicotine, the person will find it very difficult to quit. It was mentioned in Philip Morris' Special Report in 1981 that "Today's teenager is tomorrow's potential regular customer, and the overwhelming majority of smokers first begin to smoke while in their teens... it is during the teenage years that the initial brand choice is made".

There are approximately 5 million smokers in the Malaysia and the industry needs to replace the 20,000 smokers – its loyal customers – who die annually from more than 30 smoking-related diseases. Malaysia has about 10 per cent of smokers below the age of 19.

Since the government is compelled to implement the guidelines of the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) of which Malaysian is a party, the industry has re-strategised its marketing approach. It has been promoting electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) and vapes as a "safer alternative" to smoking.

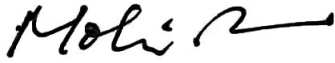
If the government allows the sale of these e-cigarettes and vapes, then there will pose a similar problem as cigarettes did for the past decades, that is nicotine addiction and negative health concerns such as emphysema and obliterative bronchiolitis ('popcorn lungs').

When CAP did a survey in 2019, CAP was shocked to discover that many school children are into vaping and even engaged in the selling of the e-liquid refill of the e-cigarette devices. It was reported in late 2019 that there were about 7,000 e-cigarette flavours in the market. The wide variety of flavours is to entice people to take up the habit/nicotine addiction.

As the way forward we call upon the government to introduce the anticipated standalone Tobacco Control Act to replace the Control of Tobacco Control Regulation (CTPR) 1993 which had been ironically placed under the Food Act 1983. Without reining in the industry, it would be impossible to reduce the RM7.4 billion needed by the government to treat major smoking-related diseases by 2025.

For the youth, they can spend their limited pocket money on food and other necessities instead of cigarettes or e-cigarettes because this is the time when proper nutrition is very important for their growth spurts. The education ministry can consider adopting tobacco control issues as part of the education syllabus.

We cannot trust the industry when it said, “Our goal is to build awareness of better alternatives to cigarettes, and for legal age smokers, who would otherwise continue to smoke, to make the right choice for themselves and society”. A Philip Morris executive said in 1995: “If we can frame proactive legislation or other kinds of action on the Youth Access issue... we will be protecting our industry for decades to come”. That strategy is still pursued by the industry.



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