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Press Statement

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**Will policymakers allow EVALI to continue its murderous rampage?**

The Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) likes to remind Malaysians, particularly policymakers, of the consequences of vaping. In November 2019, a teenager was admitted to the Labuan Nucleus Hospital for severe internal lung damage. It was, at that time, suspected to have been caused by vaping, making it the first of such cases to be reported in Labuan.

The teenager experienced breathing difficulties and while treated in the intensive care unit (ICU) he was diagnosed as having internal lung injuries and kidney failure.

During that same year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the United States (US) began tracking these cases and called the condition ‘e-cigarette or vaping product use-associated lung injury’ or EVALI. CDC recorded more than 2,807 cases and 68 deaths between October 2019 (the time when EVALI was first reported) and February 2020.

On 17 April 2023, the medical news source Medscape carried an article titled Forgotten but Not Gone: EVALI Epidemic Continues. It aptly stated, “For many, the EVALI epidemic is a distant, pre-COVID memory” but in reality, it still is a potent threat.

The Minister of Health, Dr Zaliha Mustafa, said in a recent parliamentary session that a 16-year-old girl, with 3-year vaping history, died last June 5. The teenager’s death was attributed to “acute heart failure with pulmonary embolism in a probable EVALI case”.

MoH received 17 reported EVALI cases within the first two weeks of June 2023.

Dr Zaliha also highlighted a nicotine poisoning case of a 2-year-old who now has neurological problems. This solitary case is just the tip of the iceberg as the Universiti Sains Malaysia-based National Poison Centre reported 66 calls of vaping-related poisoning between January 2015 and August 2022. Most of the cases involved children aged between one and four years old, the youngest being 4 months.

With the emergence of new evidence and the health of Malaysians at stake, we regret that the Control of Smoking Products for Public Health Bill 2023 of such importance is referred to the Health parliamentary special select committee (PSSC) for further study. Such a move will inadvertently delay the passing of the Bill thereby allowing more underaged children to take up vaping or be exposed to accidental poisoning by nicotine. In the meantime, all policymakers responsible for the disastrous outcome will have the blood of EVALI victims on their hands for failing their duty.

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