

NEWS RELEASE

Reduction in Tobacco Use and Increase in Vape Demonstrate Malaysian Smokers Embrace Harm Reduction by Switching to Vape to Quit Smoking

KUALA LUMPUR, 22 May 2024 –The Advanced Centre for Addiction Treatment Advocacy (ACATA) welcomed the findings of the Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS), which revealed a significant reduction in tobacco use among Malaysians, while the incidence in vape use increases, demonstrating an increasing number of Malaysian smokers are switching to vape to quit smoking tobacco products.

According to the report, tobacco use among Malaysians decreased from 23% in 2011 to 19% in 2023, while vape use increased from 0.8% to 5.8% over the same period. These figures highlight the smokers' preference for harm reduction approach despite the lack of comprehensive regulations that facilitate tobacco harm reduction.

Dr Arifin Fii, President of Advanced Centre for Addiction Treatment Advocacy said, “This is the first time that Malaysia achieved a significant reduction in smoking prevalence. Based on National Health and Morbidity Surveys (NHMS), Malaysian adults smoking prevalence has plateaued for the past three decades with 24.8% in 1996, 21.5% in 2006, 23.1% in 2011, 22.8% in 2015 and 21.3% in 2019. GATS showed that the accelerated reduction in smoking prevalence coincides with the rapid rise in nicotine vape use.”

Since there have been no major policy and regulatory change in tobacco control in the last decade, this rapid decline in smoking prevalence strongly suggests that more smokers are moving away from tobacco and substituting it with the much less harmful vape. More importantly, this reaffirms that vape is an effective tool for quit smoking which is an important step towards reducing the health risks associated with smoking.

Similar trend in the decline in smoking prevalence is also seen in countries like the United Kingdom (UK), where its smoking prevalence has been significantly reduced through the use of vape. According to data from UK's tobacco control body, Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), overall rate of smoking in adults in England in 2022 was 12.7%, down from 13% in 2021. Meanwhile, the proportion of the population using vape stood at is 9.1% compared to 7.1% in 2021.

Results from GATS also indicated that despite of an increase in healthcare providers giving quit-smoking advice, attempts to quit tobacco have remained stagnant. Instead, the use of nicotine vape (14%) became a more popular choice for quit smoking than medication (10%) or counselling (8%). This implies that the current tobacco control measures are insufficient and ineffective. A more bold and innovative measures such as tobacco harm reduction approach using tools like vape is a very sensible way forward in tobacco control that will rapidly reduce the prevalence of smoking in Malaysia.

ACATA advocates for a more pragmatic policies that support and facilitates smokers to quit smoking by empowering them with knowledge, facts, and awareness to make informed decisions rather than imposing a very restrictive and prohibitive measures. Recent proposed measures for nicotine vaping products indicated by the Ministry of Health, such as display ban, restricting flavours and standardised packaging guidelines, will be counterproductive and will deter smokers switching from deadly smoking to a the much less harmful nicotine vaping.

"Smokers need education and support, not restrictive regulations," **Dr Arifin** added. "By embedding harm reduction strategies into quit-smoking programmes, we can provide smokers with the tools they need to succeed in their efforts to quit."

About Advanced Centre for Addiction Treatment Advocacy

Advanced Centre for Addiction Treatment Advocacy or ACATA is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) working to reduce addiction-related harms for Malaysians. It is promoting evidence-based public health policies with human rights-based approaches, through research and analysis. Helmed by medical professionals, ACATA strives to increase local studies on addiction and the implementation of progressive science-based regulatory frameworks through advocacy, public awareness, education, and research dissemination.

For more information, visit <http://acata.com.my/index.html>