

NEWS RELEASE

ADOPT NEW ZEALAND AND SWEDEN'S HARM REDUCTION APPROACH TO REDUCE SMOKING RATES IN MALAYSIA

KUALA LUMPUR, 1 August 2024 – The Advanced Centre for Addiction Treatment Advocacy (ACATA) is calling for urgent and comprehensive tobacco harm reduction measures to be included in the upcoming regulations that will be introduced under the Control of Smoking Products for Public Health 2024 (Act 852).

Drawing comparisons from New Zealand and Sweden from a recent report, ACATA highlighted the potential of regulated harm reduction alternatives to significantly reduce smoking prevalence in Malaysia, ultimately saving thousands of lives.

Dr Arifin Fii, President of the Advanced Centre for Addiction Treatment Advocacy said, "For nearly a decade, Malaysia's smoking prevalence has remained stagnant at approximately 20%, posing significant public health challenges. However, international examples demonstrate that strategic harm reduction initiatives can yield unprecedented declines in smoking rates. ACATA believes Malaysia can achieve similar success by embracing a harm reduction approach and introducing supportive regulations for lower-risk alternatives like vaping."

According to the *Quitting Strong: New Zealand's Smoking Cessation Success Story*, the legalisation and regulation of vaping as an adult consumer product in New Zealand in 2020 catalysed a remarkable 43% decline in daily adult smoking rates, from 11.9% in 2020 to 6.8% in 2023. The country's goal of becoming smoke-free by 2025 is now within reach. Notably, targeted and culturally appropriate campaigns led to an unprecedented 41% decline in daily smoking among Māori smokers, from 28.6% in 2020 to 17.1% in 2023.

New Zealand government initiatives, such as the establishing the [Vaping Facts education website](#), driving the [Vape to Quit Strong campaign](#), and providing clear guidance for health professionals, were instrumental in this achievement.

Similarly, Sweden experienced a significant 55% reduction in smoking rates over the last decade, dropping to 5.6%. This decline was driven by the widespread adoption of snus (a smokeless oral tobacco product), the introduction of vaping in 2015, and nicotine pouches in 2018.

"Malaysia has an urgent need to adopt a comprehensive harm reduction strategy that includes the regulation of vaping products. By looking at the success of countries like New Zealand and Sweden, we can see the transformative impact of providing smokers with lower-risk alternatives. Act 852 must be balanced to support harm reduction measures to effectively combat smoking prevalence in Malaysia," **Dr Arifin** added.

ACATA emphasized that the upcoming legislation should prioritise harm reduction and not impose overly restrictive measures, as this would be counter-productive. "Implementing evidence-based harm reduction strategies, coupled with robust education and support, can pave the way for a smoke-free Malaysia. We urge the government to act swiftly and decisively, ensuring that Act 852 includes provisions that promote, rather than hinder, access to safer alternatives for adult smokers," **Dr Arifin** concluded.

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>