# Stubbing out the tobacco and nicotine industry's harmful products: improving Scotland's health

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Taking Action on Smoking and Health

### Stub out harms and inequalities caused by tobacco

- Introduce a 'polluter pays' levy to hold tobacco companies accountable, and a public health levy to hold supply chain corporations accountable.
- Invest £10 million each year for the delivery of smoking prevention and cessation services to save future NHS costs.
- Invest £375,00 each year to run quit smoking campaigns to save future NHS costs.

### Stub out tobacco industry interference

- All attempts by the tobacco and nicotine industry to interfere in public health policy are rejected.
- Scottish Government must audit its compliance with WHO's FCTC Article 5.3.

### Stub out cigarette filters and create health promoting environments

- Extend smoke-free and aerosol-free environments (SAFE) to all indoor spaces.
- Extend SAFE spaces to areas used by children.
- Extend SAFE spaces to protect working people.
- Ban all cigarette filters.

### Stub out the youth vaping epidemic

- Ban advertising and promotions of vapes and nicotine pouches.
- Ban added flavours, colours and branding on all vapes and nicotine pouches.
- Robust data on children smoking and vaping should be routinely published.

**ASH Scotland's manifesto briefing for 2026 Scottish Parliament election**

ASH Scotland is calling on all political parties to join us in working to achieve the goal of reducing smoking rates to 5% or less across all our communities by 2034 to reduce inequalities, premature deaths, tobacco-related costs to Scottish society and tackle the public health concern of nicotine addiction among our children and young people.

## Tobacco remains a leading cause of ill health and death in Scotland

The tobacco industry makes products which are not only addictive and health-harming but, when used as the manufacturer intended, will kill up to two thirds of the 685,000 people in Scotland who smoke.

Smoking is a major cause of common cancers, heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, dementia and many respiratory conditions including COPD.

Smoking tobacco continues as the highest cause of preventable ill-health and early death in Scotland, leading to nearly 9,000 deaths every year. This is more than the annual deaths from alcohol, drugs, fires, homicide and suicide combined.

Over 4,500 cancer deaths and 2,000 deaths from heart and circulatory diseases are attributable to smoking in Scotland each year.

## Inequalities driven by use of tobacco

There is a huge inequalities gap with smoking prevalence in our poorest Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 1 quintiles being 23%, while it is 6% for the least deprived SIMD 5 quintiles.

The smoking rate in Scotland has declined from 51% in 1974 to 14% in 2023 and 2024, but at the current rate, the 2034 target of 5% prevalence or lower in all communities will be missed.

People in the most deprived areas are more likely to die from lung cancer, heart or circulatory disease than those in the least deprived areas.

## The cost of smoking to Scotland's society, economy and environment

The estimated cost of smoking to the health service, social care and responding to fire-related incidents in Scotland was £1.56 billion in 2024, and is projected to reach £2.5 billion by 2035/36.

Around 63,000 households in Scotland could be lifted out of relative poverty if residents were supported to successfully quit smoking. An average smoker in Scotland who gives up tobacco could save £3,332 within 12 months.

Cigarette filters do not reduce harm but give the illusion that smoking is safer, Made from plastic cellulose acetate, filters take up to 14 years to degrade, release more than 100 microplastic fibres into the environment daily and leak thousands of toxic chemicals which threaten marine life.

## Scotland's adolescent recreational nicotine epidemic

Results from the Health Behaviours in School-aged Children in 2022 show that ever-use of vapes in 15-year-olds is higher by girls (40%) than boys (33%), as well as current use by girls (30%) and boys (20%) in Scotland.

There is an urgent need for up-to-date reliable robust relevant data in Scotland to provide a clearer picture of overall trends and inequalities in children's use of tobacco, vapes and nicotine pouches to drive more targeted prevention and guide effective policies to protect health and save lives.

This is a major public health concern. Young people who use vapes are at three times greater risk starting to smoke tobacco. Vapes contain high levels of addictive nicotine as well as toxic chemicals and carcinogens producing both short-term and long-term damage.

## Use the most powerful policy levers

Tobacco companies line their pockets with an estimated £900 million profit in the UK. Introducing a polluter pays levy at UK level and a public health levy in Scotland would hold tobacco producers and supplier chains financially accountable for the damage done by health harming products. Doing this via restrictions on price controls would ensure that payment comes from producer and wholesale profits and not from consumers or retailers.

A levy on tobacco companies could raise up to £700 million each year to support smoking cessation and wider public health work.

# Stub out harms and inequalities caused by tobacco

With Big Tobacco making an estimated £900 million profit in the UK and smoking rates in Scotland being consistently higher than the UK average, revenue ring-fenced for prevention and cessation services can be generated by introducing levies on this predatory industry and corporations involved in the supply chain.

In 2025, Canada has introduced a polluter pays charge which requires tobacco companies to reimburse the government tobacco-related expenses for its national tobacco control strategy which costs CA$66 million per year.

ASH Scotland advocates support for the World Health Organization's clinical treatment guideline for tobacco cessation in adults that only products which are medically licensed and have the strongest evidence base for efficacy, are tested, monitored and quality-controlled should be recommended to people needing support to quit smoking. This excludes vapes.

Behavioural support from NHS Scotland's Quit Your Way services improves the chance of success by three to four times. In 2024/25, 5,352 successful 12-week quits were supported in deprived areas, short of the target of 7,026 quits.

Scottish Government funding to NHS regional health boards to deliver smoking prevention and cessation services decreased from £10,610,000 to £9,144,964 between 2016/17 and 2021/22, and no details are available for recent years.

The Scottish Government provided a budget of £370,978 to run a smoking cessation campaign in 2017/18, and then Public Health Scotland spent only £70,000 each time to deliver campaigns to promote Quit Your Way in 2023/24 and 2025/26.

Calculations by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) suggest that every £1 invested in smoking cessation could save £10 in future healthcare costs and health benefits.

## Recommendations

- Introduce a polluter pays levy at UK level and a public health levy in Scotland to hold tobacco companies and supply chain corporations accountable for the damage done by health harming products, with restrictions on price controls so that the financial payment comes from producer and wholesale profits, and not from consumers or retailers.
- The Scottish Government should demonstrate transparency and accountability by annually publishing its funding for smoking prevention and cessation services and direct NHS regional health boards to ring-fence funding for those services.
- Reduce inequalities through targeted support for deprived and high-risk communities where smoking prevalence is highest by investing £10 million each year for smoking prevention and cessation services, and extend support to treat nicotine addiction.
- The Scottish Government should provide funding of £375,000 each year to run mass media, social media and outdoor advertising campaigns highlighting health and financial benefits to motivate people who smoke or use recreational nicotine products to quit.

# Stub out tobacco industry attempts to distort, disrupt or delay regulation of its addictive health-harming products

ASH Scotland challenges corporate interference in public health by rebutting tobacco industry misinformation and upholding the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) Article 5.3.

WHO describes tobacco industry interests as 'fundamentally and irreconcilably opposed' to the aims of public health'. The UK is a signatory to WHO's FCTC Article 5.3, which demands that Big Tobacco and its vested or commercial interests are permitted to be consulted only after health policies have been fully developed, and engagement should be limited to the extent necessary to implement regulations.

The tobacco industry and its commercial allies consistently try to undermine public health efforts through disrupting or delaying regulations by claiming to be part of solutions to problems it created, while aggressively targeting marketing of addictive health harming products such as vapes and nicotine pouches at young people.

The Scottish Government committed to audit its compliance with WHO's FCTC Article 5.3 in its 2013 tobacco strategy, but has yet to do so.

Organisations with links to the tobacco industry can be found at the www.tobaccotactics.org website published by the University of Bath's Tobacco Control Research Group.

WHO, (2012 September) 'Preventative Interventions'

## Recommendations

- The Scottish Government and all MSPs should reject all attempts by the tobacco industry and its vested or commercial interests to interfere in policy development and avoid any appearance of partnership working regarding tobacco and recreational nicotine products such as vapes and nicotine pouches.

- The Scottish Government should audit its compliance in upholding the WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control FCTC Article 5.3 and publish a report within 12 months of taking office.

# Stub out cigarette filters and extend SAFE spaces to create health promoting environments

Scotland was one of the first nations to ban smoking in enclosed public places on 26 March 2006. The ban led to a 17% reduction in hospital admissions for heart attacks in its first year, significant progress compared to the 3% annual reduction in the preceding decade.

There was a decrease in heart attacks across people who smoked, former smokers and non-smokers due to reduced second-hand smoke exposure. It also led to an 18% annual reduction in hospital admissions for childhood asthma, which had been increasing by 5% each year.

The United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution in 2022 declaring that everyone has a right to clean air, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, incorporated into Scots Law in 2024, states governments must provide a clean environment for children to stay healthy.

ASH Scotland advocates for extending smoke-free and aerosol-free environments (SAFE spaces) to areas used by children to challenge the normalisation of smoking or vaping and create health promoting communities protected from second-hand smoke and toxic particulate aerosol exposure.

We also advocate for a ban of all cigarette filters which offer no health benefits, exacerbate environmental damage, mislead people who smoke into considering cigarettes to be safer, and discourage quit smoking attempts.

## Recommendations

- Extend SAFE spaces to include all public indoor and enclosed spaces to protect people from breathing pollutants where second-hand smoke or particulate aerosols are present.
- Extend SAFE spaces to include public areas frequently used by children such as school grounds and playparks.
- Extend SAFE spaces to protect people in all working environments.
- Ban all cigarette filters.

# Stub out the youth vaping epidemic by preventing uptake of recreational nicotine products

Tobacco industry promotions have lured children into starting to use their addictive, harmful products for decades and the same is happening with recreational nicotine products such as vapes and pouches.

Reports about young people in Scotland vaping illicit substances such as Spice, and the increasing awareness and use of nicotine pouches, are alarming.

ASH Scotland and leading respiratory paediatricians in Scotland are calling for strong regulatory action to tackle the 'vaping epidemic in the adolescent population' and reduce nicotine consumption among our young people.

The high levels of nicotine in pouches have strong effects on the cardiovascular system and is a health risk for children.

To protect the health of children now and of future generations, the availability and marketing of vapes, nicotine pouches, heated tobacco and herbal smoking products must be restricted as a matter of urgency.

## Recommendations

- Ban advertising, promotions and the visibility of vapes and nicotine pouches in retail environments to ensure they cannot be seen.
- Ban added flavours and standardise device designs and packaging by preventing imagery, colours, descriptors and branding attractive to children on all vapes and nicotine pouches.
- The Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland should routinely publish robust data on children's use of tobacco, vapes and nicotine pouches which is representative of the spectrum of Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD).

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Taking Action on Smoking and Health

ASH Scotland works in and for Scotland at national, UK and international levels, taking action to reduce the harms caused by tobacco and related products.

ASH Scotland is one of the four independently run and funded ASH organisations operating in each of Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We work with the Scottish Government to implement its 10-year Tobacco and Vaping Framework and support coordinated UK and devolved action to progress Scotland towards achieving a tobacco-free generation in 2034.

For further information, background evidence or to request meetings to discuss ASH Scotland's policy calls, 2026 Scottish Parliament election candidates and political parties can email publicaffairs@ashscotland.org.uk.

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