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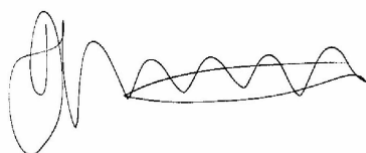
100 experts sign a public letter on the abject failure of the WHO approach to tobacco smoking and public health – statement by David Nutt

Smoking causes a massive burden of death and disease worldwide, killing about eight million people annually and so on a similar scale to the COVID pandemic so far. But we now have vaping and other smoke-free alternatives to cigarettes that can dramatically cut the risks for people who cannot or do not want to quit using nicotine. There is no real scientific doubt that these smoke-free products are much safer than smoking and that they can help smokers quit. So we should be working hard to make that happen.

And yet the World Health Organisation has dug in against vaping and the other alternatives and is throwing every possible obstacle in the way. WHO continues to insist that smokers should just stop, even though we know millions of smokers simply will not do that and millions will continue to take up the habit. There are no other areas of public health where just demanding abstinence or trying to enforce abstinence via prohibition is seen as a credible strategy, but that is exactly what WHO is advocating for nicotine. The idea of harm reduction is deeply embedded in drugs and sexual health policy, for example. But for nicotine, it seems WHO would rather adopt an ideological stance and fail than take a pragmatic approach and save lives.

One hundred experts have come together to call for an independent review of WHO's scientific and policy analysis and to challenge its decision-making. We are calling on the WHO leadership to launch a comprehensive rethink. We need to see some sign that WHO is embracing innovation, not squandering the opportunity to make a real difference to the global burden of cancer, heart disease and crippling lung conditions.

Yours truly,



Professor David Nutt DM FRCP FRCPsych FBPhS FMedSci DLaws

Notes: Professor Nutt's [biography](#). The letter in [English](#), [French](#), [Spanish](#) will be publicly available 09.00 GMT 18 October and sent to delegates of the Ninth Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP-9) of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, a global intergovernmental treaty in which WHO plays a major role. This meeting will be held on 8-13 November 2021: details are on the [COP-9 website](#).