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## SELECT COMMITTEE ON TOBACCO HARM REDUCTION

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### ORYGEN SUBMISSION

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Orygen welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Select Committee on Tobacco Harm Reduction. Orygen supports efforts to reduce harm for young people from tobacco and related products.

- Tobacco smoking occurs at very high rates in young people with mental ill-health relative to their peers and causes profound health disparities.
- Available evidence indicates the potential harm from e-cigarettes is less than tobacco smoking.
- Research is needed to determine if e-cigarettes are an efficacious and acceptable smoking cessation option for young people with mental ill-health.

### ABOUT ORYGEN

Orygen is the world's leading research and knowledge translation organisation focusing on mental ill-health in young people. At Orygen, our leadership and staff work to deliver cutting-edge research, policy development, innovative clinical services, and evidence-based training and education to ensure that there is continuous improvement in the treatments and care provided to young people experiencing mental ill-health.

### YOUNG PEOPLE, TOBACCO SMOKING AND E-CIGARETTES

While in developed countries the rate of tobacco smoking by young people is decreasing, the use of electronic cigarettes is increasing among 15 to 24 year olds.(1) In Australia, between 2016 and 2019 the proportion of 15 to 24 year olds ever using e-cigarettes increased from 17.1% to 22.3%. (2) A similar rate of ever use of e-cigarettes is evident in the US (21.6%) with slightly lower rates in Canada among 16-30 year olds (16.2%).(3, 4) The prevalence of regular use (i.e., every day or some days) is lower, at around 1 in 20 young people (5.1% in the US and 5.7% in Canada). Experimental use of e-cigarettes is widely reported among young people including among under 18s. (2, 4, 5) Reasons for experimentation include curiosity, appealing flavours and peer influence.(6) Prior tobacco use is a predictor of e-cigarette use among young people.(4, 5)

### MENTAL HEALTH

Experiences of mental ill-health are a risk factor for young people beginning tobacco smoking.(7) In Australia tobacco smoking rates among people experiencing mental ill-health are markedly higher. (8) This difference emerges early, young people with mental ill-health are far more likely to smoke cigarettes, with daily smoking rates up to 77%.(9, 10). Given that adults with mental ill-health are estimated to account for 38% of tobacco-related deaths (11), early intervention with young people is required to prevent these very poor health outcomes. There is also a correlation between experiences of mental ill-health and e-cigarette use. Young people (18 to 24 years) who currently use e-cigarettes were twice as likely to report depression compared with peers who had never used e-cigarettes.(12)

### Recommendation

Tobacco harm reduction measures should include targeted early intervention and treatment programs to reduce tobacco smoking among young people experiencing mental ill-health.

### REVOLUTION IN MIND

## SUPPORTING CESSATION

E-cigarettes are increasingly being used to support a reduction or cessation in smoking including among people aged under 30 years. (3, 4) In the US there is wide awareness among young people that e-cigarettes are used for this purpose.(13) In Australia, young people (15-24 years) also cite smoking reduction or cessation and harm reduction as reasons for using e-cigarettes (see Table 1). Parental approval of the use of e-cigarettes for smoking cessation has been reported by young people in the US.(13)

Despite these promising indications, there is insufficient evidence about the efficacy of e-cigarettes to support smoking cessation or reduction in young people, including those with mental ill-health.

TABLE 1 REASONS FOR USING E-CIGARETTES

Reason*	Proportion of young people 15 to 24 years
To help me quit smoking	12.5%
To try to cut down on the number of cigarettes I smoke/smoked	11.1%
To try to stop me going back to smoking regular cigarettes	8.9%
I think they are less harmful than regular cigarettes	20.4%
They are cheaper than regular cigarettes	10.6%
I think they taste better than regular cigarettes	21.2%
They seem more acceptable than regular cigarettes	9.5%
Out of curiosity	72.3%
Other	10.8%

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2)

\* People could select more than one response.

## PERCEPTION OF HARM

Young people have more positive perceptions of e-cigarettes compared with tobacco smoking.(14) One-in-four Australian young people report they think e-cigarettes are less harmful than smoking tobacco.(2) Young people in the US also perceive e-cigarettes as less harmful, but there are mixed views on the addiction risk of e-cigarettes.(13-15) Policy arguments for e-cigarettes argue that the harm reduction benefits of non-combustible tobacco, while still presenting a risk of nicotine addiction and potentially other risks, make it an important smoking cessation option.(16)

## RISK OF BEING A “GATEWAY” TO SMOKING

While e-cigarette use is higher among young people who smoke tobacco, there is little evidence that e-cigarette use leads causally to tobacco smoking.(17) A longitudinal study of initiation of tobacco products among adolescents (12 to 17 years) found a pathway from tobacco smoking to a combination of e-cigarettes and combustible tobacco use was evident. The reverse was less common.(18) Moreover, even in cases where e-cigarette use occurs before tobacco smoking, there is little evidence that tobacco smoking was caused by the earlier e-cigarette use.

## Recommendation

On available evidence, tobacco harm reduction measures should include the option of e-cigarettes. Research is urgently needed to understand how acceptable and effective e-cigarettes are as a smoking cessation approach among young people with mental ill-health.

## CONTACT DETAILS

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