

■ E-CIGARETTES

■ HEATED TOBACCO PRODUCTS

NOVEMBER 1, 2023

COMBATING THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY'S PLAYBOOK FOR EMERGING TOBACCO AND NICOTINE PRODUCTS: A MESSAGE GUIDE



INTRODUCTION

THE THREAT OF EMERGING TOBACCO AND NICOTINE PRODUCTS

Around the world, the tobacco industry is aggressively promoting addictive tobacco and nicotine products including e-cigarettes, heated tobacco products (HTPs), nicotine pouches, and other emerging products. These products pose a serious threat to the health of people around the world—especially youth—and to the immense progress we have made globally to curb addiction to nicotine and tobacco. Meanwhile, the tobacco industry is pouring resources into ad campaigns and influence strategies positioning these products as “harm reduction” tools, effectively co-opting a legitimate public health strategy to market their addictive products.

These products can pose dangers for smokers and non-smokers alike when not properly regulated. While there may be some health benefits to adult smokers if they stop smoking completely and switch to one of these emerging products, this is often not the way the products are used.

We know plenty of non-smokers—especially children and youth—are using these products, especially e-cigarettes, at increasing rates and becoming addicted to nicotine. While nicotine use is harmful in and of itself, it also increases the likelihood that these young people will go on to use cigarettes in the future. At the same time, that data shows that many smokers who use these products aren’t quitting cigarettes. Instead, many smokers end up becoming dual users of both cigarettes and emerging products, increasing the risks to their health.

Amidst all this, the tobacco industry is using these products to launder their reputation, positioning themselves as advocates for a “smoke-free future” with policymakers, regulators, journalists, and the public. We know that tobacco companies will use any enhancement of their reputations to attempt to weaken existing, effective tobacco and nicotine control policies.

WHY WE CREATED THIS GUIDE

When we talked to tobacco control advocates around the world, we heard many of the same challenges. Tobacco companies are pushing their message hard, and it’s breaking through in the media and with policymakers. Advocates need a clear, defined message that pushes back against the aggressive marketing of these products and dismantles the tobacco industry’s false claims. The industry is waging a large-scale, coordinated campaign to promote emerging products, and the global tobacco control community must come together around a shared communications strategy to effectively fight back.

We also know advocates are getting hit with tough questions and repeated industry talking points, and need clear guidance on how to respond. This guide is designed to help advocates navigate those tough conversations, pivot away from the industry’s playbook, and steer the conversation back toward the real harms posed by these products.

INTRODUCTION

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The guide is divided into three sections:

1. **Messaging Guidance:** This section offers general guidance for communicating about these issues, including phrases to avoid, language to embrace, and tips for how to communicate effectively without reinforcing the industry narrative.
2. **Core Messaging:** This section details the core message to use in proactive communications about emerging products, focused on emphasizing the threats these products pose, most particularly to young people.
3. **Opposition Messaging:** This section provides messages designed to combat the industry's "harm reduction" narrative, and can be used when advocates need to directly respond or combat the opposition message.

In addition to this message guide, additional resources (including product-specific talking points, frequently asked questions, template materials, and more) can be found on our digital resource hub at [\[LINK\]](#).

WE'RE HERE TO HELP

Communicating to policymakers and other stakeholders about these products is complicated, and the data is constantly changing. We're here to help. To put the lessons of this message guide into action, we will be facilitating messaging and spokesperson trainings where we will help advocates apply the principles of this message guide to the specific circumstances in their country or region.

For a schedule of our upcoming trainings or to get in touch with us to talk about training opportunities, visit [\[LINK\]](#).

MESSAGING GUIDANCE

When you are waging a communications campaign against a well-funded, highly coordinated opponent like the tobacco industry, it is not enough to simply state your side of the story. It is critical to employ proven messaging strategies that not only combat the opposition's narrative but also strengthen your own.

On the issue of emerging products like e-cigarettes, HTPs, and nicotine pouches, the industry desperately wants the conversation to be about “harm reduction” and the relative dangers of the products compared to cigarettes. We have seen evidence that this message from the industry is breaking through to policymakers and the media around the world. **We need to reframe the conversation about emerging products.**

We know that when tobacco control advocates are forced into a debate about the differences in health harms between cigarettes and emerging products, we are at a disadvantage. That is not because these products aren't harmful, but because the long-term health effects of these products are still unknown. The industry is taking full advantage of this lack of evidence to aggressively promote these products as “safe alternatives” to cigarettes.

To win this debate and turn the tide against these products, advocates must employ a messaging strategy that avoids getting trapped in a “harm reduction” dialogue comparing emerging products to cigarettes, and instead pushes our own message: **all tobacco and nicotine products must be regulated to protect public health, especially that of the children and youth the industry is purposely targeting with these products.**

MESSAGING GUIDANCE

Here are a few key opposition messaging strategies to keep in mind when communicating about emerging products.

1. Challenge the tobacco industry’s claims without repeating them

When your opposition is willing to use false and misleading information to further their goals, it can be tempting to address these falsehoods head-on. The popularity of the “Myth vs. Fact” framework is a key example of this approach.

However, research has shown this approach doesn’t work. [Studies](#) have repeatedly proven that after being

exposed to “myth vs. fact” content, audiences can recall the information they saw, but tend to forget what is a myth and what is a fact. The end result is that exposing audiences to misinformation—even in order to disprove it—can have the [unintended consequence](#) of cementing it as truth in the minds of your audience.

In the debate on emerging products, the tobacco industry has shown willingness to bolster their arguments with flimsy statistics, misleading statements, and outright falsehoods. To effectively push back against their efforts, tobacco control advocates must challenge these claims *without* repeating them.

Replace:	→	With...
The tobacco industry claims that e-cigarettes are 95% less harmful than cigarettes, but that’s not true.		There’s a lot we don’t know about the long-term dangers of e-cigarettes, but we do know they contain toxic chemicals and are extremely addictive.
The tobacco industry wants you to think these products are meant for “harm reduction.” But all they are interested in is getting more people addicted to their products.		Legitimate harm reduction doesn’t include selling new, addictive products on the open market to smokers and non-smokers alike, and it doesn’t include marketing to children and youth.
Myth: E-cigarettes can help smokers quit cigarettes. Fact: Many smokers who start using e-cigarettes also keep smoking, increasing the risks to their health.		There is insufficient evidence that e-cigarettes help smokers quit smoking. Many existing smokers who start using new products continue smoking cigarettes, too.

MESSAGING GUIDANCE

2. Avoid getting trapped in a debate about new products versus cigarettes.

The tobacco industry is doing everything in its power to ensure that in both the media and in policymaking spaces, the conversation about emerging products is framed as a conversation about health harms as compared to traditional cigarettes. They have poured resources into this “harm reduction” framing, with large-scale ad campaigns about their pursuit of a “smoke-free future.”

When tobacco control advocates engage in the conversation about health harms, we often struggle to articulate the threats posed by emerging products as compared to cigarettes.

The evidence on the health harms of cigarettes far outweighs the developing evidence on emerging products, making it difficult to win an argument about the use of emerging products being “safer” than smoking.

Instead, we need to reframe the conversation to be about the industry profiting off of addictive, harmful products and purposely marketing them to children and youth. When we focus on the fact that these products are highly addictive, harmful in their own right, and especially dangerous for the young people who are being explicitly targeted by the industry, we can change the dialogue about comparing harms into one about eliminating them.

When they say...	→	We say...
E-cigarettes are harm reduction products, meant to help smokers quit cigarettes.		The tobacco industry is not interested in harm reduction. If they were, they wouldn't market these products to young people and non-smokers. Tobacco companies are interested in one thing: profiting off of new, addictive products.
Smokeless products are a safer alternative to traditional cigarettes.		No one knows just how damaging these emerging products will be to users' health in the long term. What we do know is that many of these products are harmful, highly addictive, and particularly appealing to children and youth.

MESSAGING GUIDANCE

3. Use pivot messages to drive the conversation back to your core message.

This guide offers two sets of messages: one designed to serve as a core message platform—the messaging you can use when you get to set the terms of communication. These messages emphasize the dangers of emerging products and the calculated marketing strategies the industry is using to get them into the hands of non-smokers, especially children and youth. However, there will be times when you need to engage directly with the industry’s narrative.

For these instances, the opposition message platform can be used to combat and reframe the industry message.

As much as possible, you should use opportunities to move the conversation from the opposition message back to your core message. You can think of this strategy like playing a tennis match—you need to respond strongly to your opponent’s hit, then quickly put the ball back in their court.

You can use pivot messages to make this transition. This is an especially important tool to use in media interviews, in which every question asked by a journalist should be approached not as a direct answer to the question, but an opportunity to get your core message across.

EXAMPLES OF USING A PIVOT MESSAGE

Question		
The industry claims emerging products like e-cigarettes are far less harmful than cigarettes and are an important tool to help people quit smoking. Do you not support their efforts to reduce smoking?		
Response		
Opposition Message →	Pivot Message →	Core Message
The tobacco industry is not interested in harm reduction. They are interested in marketing and profiting off of new, addictive products.	What we need to focus on is that the industry is purposely targeting our children and youth in the marketing of these emerging products.	We know that many of these products are harmful, highly addictive, and particularly appealing to children and youth. Young people are picking up these new products and many are quickly becoming addicted.

MESSAGING GUIDANCE

Question		
Companies like Philip Morris have stated their commitment to a “smoke-free future.” If these products are helping reduce smoking, why isn’t the tobacco control community supportive?		
Response		
Opposition Message →	Pivot Message →	Core Message
Tobacco companies are using e-cigarettes to save their industry, not to save lives.	What’s important to remember is that because of the tobacco industry’s marketing tactics, these addictive products are getting into the hands of non-smokers, especially children and youth.	We need strong, clear regulations on these products to protect our children from suffering a lifetime of addiction and avoidable health risks.

CORE MESSAGING: THE DANGERS OF EMERGING PRODUCTS

Audiences	Values	Barriers
Primary audience: Policymakers and regulators Secondary audience: Journalists, advocates, partners, business leaders	Primary value to tap into: Protecting children and youth Secondary values: Population health and well-being; strength of WHO FCTC tobacco control measures	Barriers to overcome: Belief that emerging products are not harmful

ELEVATOR SPEECH/30-SECOND SOUND BITE

Addictive products like e-cigarettes, heated tobacco products, and nicotine pouches are being marketed aggressively by the tobacco industry in [Country/Region]. No one knows just how damaging these products will be to users' health in the long term. What we do know is that many of these products are harmful, highly addictive, and particularly appealing to children and youth. We also know they are not as successful at helping smokers quit as the tobacco companies claim. Governments must pass and implement strong, clear regulations on these products to protect their citizens—especially children—from suffering a lifetime of addiction and avoidable health risks.

TALKING POINTS

Addictive products like e-cigarettes, heated tobacco products, and nicotine pouches are being marketed aggressively by the tobacco industry in [Country/Region].

The industry is purposely targeting our children and youth in the marketing of these emerging products.

- The industry pays social media influencers with millions of young followers to promote these products.
 - **Messaging Tip:** Include relevant examples from your country or region if available. You can [find examples here](#).
- These products come in fruit, candy, and dessert flavors that are clearly enticing to young users.
 - In the United States, 85% of youth e-cigarette users use flavored products.

These products are being marketed to the public as lifestyle and health products, despite the fact that they are harmful to health and extremely addictive.

- No e-cigarette product has been approved by a government as a safe and effective cessation device.
- Many people of all different ages are trying e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products, getting exposed to nicotine for the first time, and getting addicted.
- Many smokers continue to use cigarettes along with e-cigarettes and other tobacco and nicotine products.
- Evidence suggests that former smokers who use e-cigarettes as a cessation aid are twice as likely to relapse to smoking conventional cigarettes.

CORE MESSAGING: THE DANGERS OF EMERGING PRODUCTS

No one knows just how damaging these emerging products will be to users' health in the long term.

- Because these products have only recently emerged into the market, we don't yet have data on the long-term health implications of using e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products.
- Research has shown that exposure to some of the chemicals found in e-cigarette emissions, such as nickel, chromium, manganese, and lead, has been linked to cancer, organ damage, and other serious health impacts.

What we do know is that many of these products are harmful, highly addictive, and particularly appealing to children and youth.

The WHO clearly says that e-cigarettes are harmful.

- The vast majority of these products contain nicotine, which is highly addictive and can harm adolescent brain development.
- Evidence continues to emerge about the harmful effects of e-cigarettes, including studies suggesting that using e-cigarettes can have negative effects on cardiovascular and respiratory health.
- Growing evidence indicates that e-cigarette use promotes inflammation in the respiratory system, increases risk of periodontal disease, and inhibits immune cells in the lungs.

These harms are particularly pronounced for young people.

- Because adolescent brains are still developing, exposure to nicotine can be especially harmful to young users, increasing the risk of addiction and negatively impacting children's and young adults' attention, memory, and learning.

There is also consensus among tobacco control experts that use of any tobacco product is harmful.

- Parties to the WHO FCTC agreed that other emerging products such as heated tobacco products, nicotine pouches, and other devices should be regulated, including restriction and prohibition.

Nicotine use among young people is on the rise because of these products.

- Many young people and other non-smokers are picking up these new products and quickly becoming addicted to nicotine, putting them at risk for lifelong addiction.
- Research suggests that e-cigarette use increases the likelihood that youth and young adults will begin smoking conventional cigarettes.

CORE MESSAGING: THE DANGERS OF EMERGING PRODUCTS

Governments must pass strong, clear regulations on these products to protect people—especially youth—from suffering a lifetime of addiction and avoidable health risks.

- The WHO recommends that countries should “ensure that their tobacco control laws and regulations are comprehensive enough to regulate all forms of novel and emerging nicotine and tobacco products,” including e-cigarettes and HTPs.

E-cigarettes and HTPs have the dangerous potential to undo the progress we’ve made by addicting a new generation of users: children and youth that would likely never have picked up a cigarette.

- **Messaging Tip:** Include data on e-cigarette use in your country or region, with statistics about youth usage if available.

If we do not act swiftly and strongly to regulate these addictive products, we risk not only allowing our youngest citizens to become addicted to a harmful substance, but to backtrack on all the progress we’ve made toward ending cigarette use and saving lives.

- The government should act quickly to ban the sale of these products entirely.

OR

- The government should act quickly to regulate these products as medicinal/pharmaceutical products.

OR

- The government should act quickly to regulate these products by strictly applying measures that align with the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

Note: To determine which policy action is most appropriate for your country or region, please consult regulatory guidance documents for e-cigarettes [LINK] and HTPs [LINK] from the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids International Legal Consortium. The ILC uses a three-step process to assist governments in determining how to regulate these products to fit their country’s circumstances while balancing competing public health considerations.

OPPOSITION MESSAGING: COMBATING THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY NARRATIVE

Note: When communicating about e-cigarettes, HTPs, and other emerging products, it is most effective to focus on communicating the core messaging outlined before. However, in some circumstances it is necessary to directly confront the industry's "harm reduction" narrative. When using this opposition messaging, it is still important **not to repeat tobacco industry claims**, but instead to offer an alternate narrative that exposes the industry's misleading tactics.

Opposition message to confront: E-cigarettes and other new products are a safe alternative to cigarettes. These products are part of a harm reduction strategy to help users quit smoking.

ELEVATOR SPEECH/30-SECOND SOUND BITE

Tobacco companies are using e-cigarettes to save their industry, not to save lives. These and other emerging products are not intended by the industry to reduce harm or encourage users to quit smoking—they are meant to get more people, especially youth, addicted to nicotine. We know many non-smokers are getting addicted to e-cigarettes, heated tobacco products, and other emerging products. Many existing smokers who start using new products continue smoking cigarettes, too—worsening the harms to their health. As long as the industry continues profiting off tobacco and nicotine products, it will be in the business of creating and sustaining addiction.

TALKING POINTS

Tobacco companies are using e-cigarettes to save their industry, not to save lives.

- The tobacco industry has only ever been interested in one thing: making money off of its addictive products.
- The aggressive marketing of e-cigarettes, heated tobacco products, and nicotine pouches is part of the industry's strategy to hook a new generation on nicotine and keep profits high as cigarette use declines around the world.

OPPOSITION MESSAGING: COMBATING THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY NARRATIVE

These and other emerging products are not being marketed to reduce harm or encourage users to quit smoking—they are being used to get more people, especially youth, addicted to nicotine.

- We do not have clear evidence that these new products are safe or without risk.
- No e-cigarette product has been approved by a government as a safe and effective cessation device.
- Harm reduction is a public health strategy aimed at reducing risk from harmful substances. It requires strict regulation and the supervision of medical professionals.
 - No legitimate harm reduction approach includes selling new, addictive products on the open market to smokers and non-smokers alike with limited or no regulation.
- The tobacco industry is not interested in harm reduction. It is interested in marketing and profiting off of new, addictive products.

We know many non-smokers are getting addicted to e-cigarettes, heated tobacco products, and other emerging products.

- In many countries, youth uptake of e-cigarettes has rapidly increased and surpassed adult use.
- The tobacco industry deliberately markets these products to children and young people through social media.
- The industry is also fighting hard to continue selling fruit- and candy-flavored products that are clearly enticing to children and youth.
- There is also substantial evidence that youth who use e-cigarettes are more likely to begin smoking conventional cigarettes.

Many existing smokers who start using new products continue smoking cigarettes, too, which may increase their individual health risk.

- Evidence suggests that former smokers who use e-cigarettes as a cessation aid are twice as likely to relapse to smoking conventional cigarettes.

As long as the industry continues profiting off tobacco and nicotine products, it will be in the business of creating and sustaining addiction.

- There is important work to be done to help reduce the health risks for those addicted to cigarettes and other tobacco products. To be effective, that work must be led by legitimate public health and medical professionals.
- The interests of the tobacco industry are directly at odds with public health priorities.