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**CPhA Submission to the
House of Commons
Standing Committee on Health**

Study of Electronic Cigarettes

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Background

The Canadian Pharmacists Association is the national professional association providing leadership to pharmacists and supporting them in providing patient-centred care to optimize medication use and enhance outcomes. Our member organizations are national and provincial pharmacist associations, representing pharmacists practicing in community and hospital pharmacies, family practice settings, long-term care facilities, academia and industry.

CPhA is also the largest publisher in Canada of evidence-based drug and therapeutic information, widely used by pharmacists, physicians, nurses and other health care providers. This includes the CPS, sometimes referred to as the “big blue book”, and our online resource, e-Therapeutics. Smoking cessation is one of the areas for which we provide evidence-based content for providers to use in delivering quality smoking cessation services.

Pharmacists’ Role in Smoking Cessation

Pharmacists are highly accessible health care professionals who help Canadians quit smoking by providing advice, medications and support during their quit attempt. Evidence has shown that support from a health care professional increases a person’s chance of successfully, and permanently, quitting. In Canada, there are a number of smoking cessation products that are supported through clinical studies and have undergone regulatory scrutiny. These products are being recommended by pharmacists to their patients who wish to stop smoking. The selection of a suitable product is a systematic process that involves assessing each patient individually, and incorporating their specific needs and preferences.

The Canadian Pharmacists Association has been a long-time advocate for control of nicotine products. In 1990, CPhA’s Board officially opposed the sale of tobacco products in pharmacies. This position remains in effect today. In 2001, CPhA, along with eight other national health professional associations, developed a position paper on the role of health care professionals in smoking cessation. We’ve partnered with Health Canada to provide educational programs and patient care resources to assist pharmacists in the provision of smoking cessation services.

Pharmacists across the country are involved in helping Canadians quit smoking. We are frequently asked about e-cigarettes and are well aware that nicotine-containing e-cigarettes are readily available in many cities across the country and through a number of online websites. It is important for pharmacists and other health care professionals to be able to provide evidence-based answers to consumers' questions to help ensure the safe use of smoking cessation products. As far as e-cigarettes are concerned, the evidence is lacking. Pharmacists depend on the efforts of regulatory agencies such as Health Canada to provide guidance on health products that are safe and effective; it is for this reason that we show our support to Health Canada for exploring the safety and efficacy of e-cigarettes.

Concerns

Health Effects

There are a number of concerns over the use of e-cigarettes. The health effects of the use of e-cigarettes are currently unknown. They are often promoted as safer options than cigarettes. The nicotine inhaled from an e-cigarette may be cleaner than nicotine from a traditional cigarette, but it is still nicotine and e-cigarette vapour contains additional ingredients such as propylene glycol. While some of the detrimental health effects of smoking are attributed to the non-nicotine components of cigarettes, we cannot ignore the fact that nicotine itself has long-term health impacts that contribute to the risk of heart disease and stroke by increasing heart rate and blood pressure. The long-term health impact of regular e-cigarette use is simply unknown at this point. The short-term and long-term effects of inhaling propylene glycol and other additive ingredients from e-cigarettes are also unknown.

One potential harm associated with use of e-cigarettes is exposure to second-hand smoke. With vaping, as use of e-cigarettes is known, the exhaled vapour contains nicotine, so people who are choosing to live without nicotine may be exposed to it, and they may be exposed to it in places that have recently been made smoke free such as restaurants, the workplace and schools.

Normalization of Smoking: Youth

In addition to the unknown health effects, we have concerns over the normalization of

smoking. In a survey of youth in 2012, researchers found that about one in five respondents between the ages of 16 and 30 had used an e-cigarette and four out of five of respondents who smoked felt that e-cigarettes would allow them to smoke in places where it is not allowed, such as the work place. This has the potential to increase a person's nicotine consumption.

It is well known that most adult smokers began smoking before the age of 18. Relatively few people will start smoking and become a regular smoker after this age. Increasing the attractiveness of vaping increases the risk of more young Canadians becoming regular smokers. This is a serious threat to the tremendous progress Canada has made in reducing the number of smokers.

Part of our 2001 position statement outlines the importance of preventing people from starting smoking. We see the availability of e-cigarettes as a threat to the prevention of smoking initiation by normalizing smoking and presenting it as a safe way to deliver nicotine.

Unproven Effectiveness

There is no clear answer as to whether e-cigarettes help people quit smoking. We need further research into what role, if any, e-cigarettes play in smoking cessation. E-cigarette products are currently not regulated and are not required to meet Health Canada standards for pharmaceutical products or natural health products. Until we know more about their safety and effectiveness, and until such time as they are available as regulated health products, we do not think pharmacists and other health professionals should support their use.

WHO Recommendations

As part of its Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, the World Health Organization published a report on electronic nicotine delivery systems last summer. They provide advice for countries looking to deal with e-cigarettes. There are a number of points made in the report that the Committee should seriously consider during deliberations. WHO also makes several recommendations that should be seriously considered for implementation in Canada including:

- Prohibit e-cigarette manufacturers and sellers from promoting e-cigarettes as a way to quit smoking. E-cigarette manufacturers should be required to comply with the same stringent criteria as other manufacturers of smoking cessation aids before being allowed to make such claims.
- Treat e-cigarettes the same as cigarettes in terms of bans on use in public spaces. This will help to send the message that public use of any form of nicotine-containing cigarettes is not acceptable.
- Do not allow sponsorship, advertising or promotion of e-cigarettes, in the same way that this is not allowed for tobacco cigarettes.
- Restrict sales in the same way as tobacco products, to prevent uptake by minors.

Recommendations and Summary

Pharmacists take the health of Canadians very seriously. We see the long-term effects of smoking on a daily basis by dealing with people suffering from heart disease, stroke, emphysema and cancers. We want Canadians to succeed in their efforts to quit smoking, but at the same time we want to ensure that there are minimal unintended consequences to themselves or to fellow Canadians.

While we all want to see the rate of smoking decline in Canada, there is a hazard in allowing the freedom to select products that may prove to be personally harmful or harmful to others. We see unregulated e-cigarettes as a potential threat to health, and a path to nicotine addiction for a new generation of Canadians. Allowing them to be sold with no regulation exposes the public to risks associated with inhalation of the ingredients, lack of product labeling, potentially unsafe manufacture and packaging, and accidental exposure of young children to toxic doses—just to name a few.

We are asking Health Canada to take steps to regulate e-cigarettes at the same level as other nicotine products—to help reduce their potential for harm, but also to stimulate the type of research and development that could potentially result in a safe and effective new delivery option for nicotine replacement therapy, providing pharmacists and other health professionals an opportunity to support their optimal use.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this brief. We would appreciate a meeting with you to discuss this issue further.