
Response from the Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL) to the proposal for the revision of the Tobacco Taxation Directive

The [Association of European Cancer Leagues](#) (ECL), a non-profit umbrella organisation made up of 34 national and regional cancer leagues advocating for improved cancer control and care across Europe, welcomes the proposal of the European Commission for the [revision of the Tobacco Taxation Directive](#) (TTD).

The proposal paves the way for the Tobacco Free Generation, which sets the goal of reducing smoking prevalence to less than 5% by 2040, foresaw under the [Europe's Beating Cancer Plan](#), and represents a milestone towards a Europe free of cancer.

The risk to public health posed by tobacco and nicotine products

Tobacco use remains one of the leading preventable causes of death and disease in the European Union. It is responsible for approximately [700,000 deaths each year](#), with around half of all smokers dying prematurely from tobacco-related diseases. Globally, tobacco is recognised as a major driver of noncommunicable diseases, including cancer, cardiovascular, and respiratory illnesses.

The prevention of tobacco and nicotine addiction is therefore a public health priority. However, the tobacco industry continues to promote new nicotine products, such as electronic nicotine delivery systems ([e-cigarettes](#)), which are increasingly proven to be both addictive and harmful. E-cigarettes produce aerosols containing nicotine and other toxic chemicals, posing serious health risks to users.

Tobacco use remains the [leading cause of preventable cancer](#), accounting for around 27% of all cancer cases and one in four cancer deaths worldwide. It is the most significant modifiable risk factor in cancer prevention. Lung cancer continues to be one of the most common cancers, with tobacco use as its primary cause. Despite the well-established evidence of harm, tobacco and nicotine consumption persist at alarming levels, particularly among young people.

Protecting young generations from the grip of the tobacco industry

In 2024, [the WHO European Region](#) recorded the highest smoking prevalence worldwide (23.5%) and the highest rate among women globally (17.2%). At the same time, e-cigarette use among adolescents has risen sharply, with 14.3% of those aged 13–15 years—equivalent to 4.2 million young people—currently using e-cigarettes. Several EU Member States report some of the highest prevalence rates in the Region, including Hungary (24.0%), Bulgaria (23.3%), Lithuania (23.0%), Poland (22.3%), Czechia (21.4%), and Estonia (20.2%). In the Region overall, e-cigarettes have overtaken conventional cigarettes in popularity, with 32% of 15-year-olds having tried them and 20% reporting recent use.

This reality reflects the strategic efforts of the tobacco and related industries [to attract and retain young consumers](#), ensuring the continuation of nicotine addiction across generations. The industry employs flavoured, affordable, and youth-oriented products, available in more than 16,000 flavour varieties, often designed to resemble [toys](#), [popular drinks](#), [gaming consoles](#) or [everyday objects](#). These products are marketed near schools, promoted online, and frequently offered at discounted prices or in disposable formats, making them particularly accessible to adolescents.

The [health consequences](#) are well documented. Nicotine is highly addictive and harmful, and e-cigarettes emit toxic substances associated with cancer, cardiovascular disease, and respiratory disorders. Their use during adolescence may disrupt brain development, increasing the risk of learning difficulties and anxiety disorders. Furthermore, young e-cigarette users are almost [three times more likely](#) to start smoking traditional cigarettes later in life, demonstrating a clear gateway effect that perpetuates nicotine dependence and long-term health harm.

Price as the most effective way to discourage consumption

Raising prices and excise taxes on products linked to noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) is recognised as one of the most effective and rapidly impactful policy tools to reduce consumption while generating public revenue. For tobacco products, tax increases are classified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as both a “[Best Buy](#)”—among the most cost-effective and feasible interventions for NCD prevention across all income levels—and a “[Quick Buy](#)”, given that measurable reductions in tobacco use can occur within four months of implementation.

The [European Code Against Cancer](#) (5th Edition) identifies taxation as the most powerful and cost-effective instrument to reduce tobacco and nicotine consumption. Governments are urged to raise excise taxes on tobacco to at least 75% of the retail price, with annual increases, and to

apply consistent taxation to all tobacco and nicotine products, including e-cigarettes and novel products, to prevent substitution and ensure policy coherence. Policymakers are further encouraged to implement complementary measures addressing availability, marketing, packaging, cessation, and second-hand smoke exposure, in line with [the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control \(FCTC\)](#).

ECL's recommendations to prevent cancer and save lives

The Association of European Cancer Leagues welcomes the proposal for the revision of the Tobacco Taxation Directive and urge member states to adopt the most ambitious possible approach to maximise its impact on cancer prevention and public health.

In particular, ECL recommends that the following priorities be addressed:

Substantially increase taxation across all tobacco products

- Implement significant tax increases on all tobacco products.
- Recognise that price measures are among the most effective and immediate tools to reduce consumption, discourage initiation—particularly among young people—and lower healthcare costs.

Expand the scope of taxation to all nicotine products

- Extend the Directive to include all Novel and Emerging Nicotine and Tobacco Products (NENTPs), such as e-cigarettes, heated tobacco products, and nicotine pouches.
- Close the current regulatory gap, ensuring these addictive and increasingly popular products—especially among youth—are taxed consistently to prevent substitution and protect public health.

Align the Directive with public health objectives

- Ensure the revision is fully consistent with Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, particularly its goal of achieving a Tobacco-Free Generation by 2040.
- Maintain taxation as the central instrument to prevent nicotine addiction and reduce use across all population groups.

Support the European Commission's proposal without delay

- Endorse the European Commission's 2024 proposal to revise the TTD, which includes:
 - A 258% tax increase on rolling tobacco;
 - A 139% tax increase on cigarettes;
 - The inclusion of novel nicotine and tobacco products under the Directive.

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- Urge Member States to adopt this proposal promptly to reinforce the EU's leadership in cancer prevention and public health protection.

Policymakers must put people's health before profit. A Europe free of cancer begins with a Europe free of tobacco.

You can access ECL's recommendation on regulating novel and emerging nicotine and tobacco products (May 2024) [here](#).

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The [Association of European Cancer Leagues \(ECL\)](#) is a non-profit umbrella organisation made up of 34 national and regional cancer societies advocating for improved cancer control and care across Europe. Transparency registry number: 19265592757-25