

REPORT

Consultation on Tobacco Addictiveness Reduction Measures

Berlin, Germany
15-16 May 2018



**World Health
Organization**



F C T C

WHO FRAMEWORK CONVENTION
ON TOBACCO CONTROL

SECRETARIAT

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Executive Summary

A meeting on tobacco addictiveness reduction measures was held in May 2018 in Berlin, Germany, as requested by the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC).

Experts from all WHO regions discussed current and emerging knowledge on the issue and examined the potential positive and negative individual and societal consequences, as well as conditions and challenges to support successful implementation. Although there was no consensus among the participants about the merits or demerits of a nicotine or tobacco addictiveness reduction policy, discussions focused on the elements necessary for a fully informed debate, particularly of combusted tobacco products, for which more evidence is available.

Firstly, the potential individual consequences of nicotine reduction measures for smokers and non-smokers were examined. Experts deemed that the effects for smokers would include reduced consumption of tobacco products and a search for alternative sources of nicotine. However, for non-smokers, these effects would involve, on the one hand, a decreased initiation potential or decreased progression to the use of tobacco products, while on the other hand, it could lead to an increased initiation potential among novices, based on misconceptions about reduced health risk.

Additionally, experts explored the presumed societal consequences for tobacco control of a nicotine reduction strategy. Such an approach may lead to a desired denormalization of smoking, resulting in decreased smoking at local or global levels, environmental benefits due to reduced use of combusted tobacco products and economic benefits from reduced expenditure on tobacco-related diseases, which would improve health system outcomes. Conversely, the presumed negative societal consequences for tobacco control may involve an increase in illicit trade in tobacco products, possibly leading to higher initiation, decreased cessation and an increased rate of relapse by ex-smokers due to competition from low-priced products from illicit trade and other effects undermining tobacco control measures. Furthermore, it could impact on tax revenue, which could be an issue for governments.

Some experts noted that due to the lack of a consensus that a nicotine-reduction strategy would reduce smoking prevalence, any discussion of conditions for successful implementation would be premature. However, it was recognized that countries wishing to consider tobacco addictiveness reduction measures involving the lowering of nicotine content, should consider the policy impact, which will depend on national regulatory context. At the moment, this will suit countries with advanced/comprehensive control measures and extensive resources and knowledge to ensure adequate implementation. As a fundamental prerequisite, participants noted the importance of ensuring that key demand reduction measures under the WHO FCTC, such as those contained in Articles 6, 8, 11, 13 and 14 of the Convention and their implementation guidelines adopted by the COP, be implemented. Further, mandated reductions in nicotine to minimally addictive levels must be part of a comprehensive tobacco control approach, where key demand reduction measures are successfully implemented and a developed capacity for market surveillance and product testing exists. Experts agreed that it was not opportune to develop guidelines on nicotine reduction policies at the current time, in advance of the emergence of country experience that would be valuable in informing such guidelines.

Finally, experts summarized the potential challenges to the implementation of tobacco addictiveness reduction measures under nine headings, so policy-makers can assess the merits of such a strategy in a structured manner. These are: political/regulatory, consumer acceptability, health, capacity, scientific and country specific challenges, as well as legal, economic, agricultural/feasibility and ethical challenges.

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