

For immediate release

MOH completely misses opportunity this Stoptober

By not getting in behind Stoptober 2020, the Ministry of Health has missed an excellent opportunity to fully support Kiwi smokers, says Aotearoa Vapers Community Advocacy (AVCA).

Created by Public Health England and launched in 2012, Stoptober has become a popular initiative in many countries to encourage smokers to quit for the month of October and beyond. In the UK, the NHS, Ash, the British Lung Foundation, the British Heart Foundation and Cancer Research UK are all backing Stoptober 2020.

Co-director of AVCA, Nancy Loucas, says New Zealand does well with its Government-funded 'Vaping To Quit Smoking' campaign while District Health Boards actively promote vaping as an effective smoking cessation tool via various programmes. However, by dropping Stoptober, many Kiwis' lives and overall health remain at risk.

"Stoptober gets some real cut-through in the UK, helping many smokers to successfully quit. In New Zealand we hear a lot about 'Dry July' every year. However, it's time the Government once again got in behind Stoptober, with this year presenting a unique opportunity given Covid-19," she says.

Stoptober challenges people to give up smoking for 28 days, making them five times more likely to quit for good, according to research. What's more, vaping has proven critical to smokers successful quitting combustible tobacco, with Public Health England research confirming that vaping's 95% less harmful than smoking.

"Given the global pandemic, it's well established that the best thing smokers can do to protect their health and boost their immune system is to kick their cigarettes. In fact, more now want to as Covid-19 has made people much more cognisant of their personal health and vulnerability to illness."

Ms Loucas says it's not as though the Ministry of Health has never got in behind Stoptober. In 2014 it launched its first-ever national stop smoking month with a well-funded publicity campaign which included a dedicated stoptobernz.co.nz website which has sadly been long defunct.

"Over two million British smokers have made a 'quit attempt' since Stoptober began eight years ago, and today their overall smoking rate is 13.9% - a record low. New Zealand's rate might be lower at 12.5%, and we may have kept Covid-19 largely at bay, but let's not forget 5,000 Kiwis still die every year from smoking-related illnesses.

“2020 would’ve been a perfect year for the Ministry of Health to get in behind Stoptober, but unfortunately they completely missed the boat,” says Nancy Loucas.

About AVCA

AVCA was formed in 2016 by vapers across New Zealand wanting their voices heard in local and central government. All members are former smokers who promote vaping to help smokers quit - a much less harmful alternative to combustible tobacco products. AVCA does not have any affiliation or vested interest in industry - tobacco, pharmaceutical and/or the local vaping manufacturing or retail sectors.

www.avca.org.nz

Photo: Nancy Loucas, Director of Aotearoa Vapers Community Advocacy (AVCA)

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