

Support for nicotine reduction in cigarettes: Findings from the 2016 and 2020 ITC Four Country Smoking and Vaping Surveys

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Abstract

Introduction: The USA and New Zealand have sought to establish a product standard to set a maximum nicotine level for cigarettes to reduce their addictiveness. This study examined support for very low nicotine cigarettes (VLNCs) in Australia, Canada, England and the USA between 2016 and 2020.

Methods: Repeated cross-sectional data were analysed from participants who currently smoke, formerly smoked or vaped and/or currently vape in the 2016 (n=11,150) and/or 2020 (n=5432) International Tobacco Control (ITC) Four Country Smoking and Vaping Survey. Respondents were asked if they would support a law that reduces the amount of nicotine in cigarettes to make them less addictive. Adjusted and weighted logistic regression analyses estimated the prevalence and predictors of support, such as country, age, sex, education, income, race and smoking/vaping status for VLNCs (support vs oppose/do not know).

Results: A majority of respondents supported a VLNC law, with support highest in Canada (69%; 2016 and 2020 combined), followed by England (61%), Australia (60%) and the USA (58%). Overall, support decreased from 62% in 2016 to 59% in 2020 ($p=0.004$), which did not differ by country. Levels of support differed by smoking/vaping status, where those who exclusively smoked daily showed the lowest level of support (59%) and those who exclusively vaped non-daily had the highest level of support (72%).

Conclusion: More than half of respondents in all four countries—including those who smoked daily—supported a hypothetical VLNC standard to render cigarettes less addictive. It is important to examine if support is sustained after policies are implemented.

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