

Tobacco Harm Reduction Network

Several smoked and smokeless tobacco products are currently being promoted and marketed with implicit or explicit claims of reduced harm, and more such products are expected to emerge from industry pipelines. These new products may provide reduced exposure to the toxins in tobacco smoke, and may genuinely reduce the risk of continued tobacco use. Or, they may merely be more sophisticated versions of the “light” cigarette, which reduced neither exposure nor risk. There is little direct evidence that any manipulation of product design, including curing and manufacturing processes to remove specific constituents in tobacco and smoke, will result in a net public health improvement. It is possible that the mere availability of these products may discourage quitting or encourage uptake of tobacco among new or former users.

The reduced harm claims of these products have not been substantiated by independent scientific experts, and have not been evaluated or approved by any governmental authorities prior to their marketing. There is a critical need to establish research priorities and to standardize research methods for the examination of these potential reduced-exposure products. Public health practice, policy, and regulation must be informed by transdisciplinary science that is translated in a timely manner.

In order to hasten and make seamless the discovery, development, and delivery continuum, the National Cancer Institute’s Tobacco Control Research Branch has established a Harm Reduction Network. The Network has four goals:

1. Establish an independent scientific group to provide expertise and advice on tobacco harm reduction to policy makers, regulators, researchers, and consumers.
2. Develop and maintain an infrastructure for transdisciplinary collaboration and communication.
3. Develop a comprehensive strategy, including priority research areas, for assessing the impact of products and methods which may reduce exposure and harm from tobacco use.
4. Coordinate the development of a data depository, mechanisms for data sharing, and provide guidance on analysis, synthesis and interpretation, to support transdisciplinary tobacco harm reduction science.

For more information, or to join the network, contact:

Mark Parascandola, Ph.D.
Tobacco Control Research Branch
Behavioral Research Program
Division of Cancer Control and
Population Sciences
National Cancer Institute
6130 Executive Blvd., MSC 7337
Executive Plaza North, Room 4044
Bethesda, MD 20892-7337
mark.parascandola@nih.hhs.gov
301-451-4587

or

Pamela I. Clark, Ph.D.
Battelle Centers for Public Health
Research and Evaluation
6115 Falls Road, Suite 200
Baltimore, MD 21209
clarkp@battelle.org
410-372-2750

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