



Perceptions on Tobacco Harm Reduction and Nicotine in France and Germany

With a global comparison

Report

The survey was commissioned by the Consumer Choice Center in cooperation with the World Vapers' Alliance via the research company Info Sapiens in July 2022.

The authors:

Maria Chaplia, Research Manager at the **Consumer Choice Center**

Michael Landl, Director at the **World Vapers' Alliance**

Bill Wirtz, Senior Policy Analyst at the **Consumer Choice Center**



Key findings

Lack of knowledge on harm reduction among doctors

- Only three out of 15 doctors in Germany say they know the term harm reduction.
- In France, the majority of surveyed doctors know the term.
- The majority of German doctors do not perceive vaping products as a harm-reduction tool.
- In France, more doctors perceive vaping products as a harm-reduction tool.

These results show that too many general practitioners still follow the “quit or die” approach, and there is a lack of information about less harmful alternatives. Tobacco Harm Reduction should be integrated into modern medical education. Vaping alone has the potential to help [19 million](#) smokers in Europe and [200 million](#) worldwide to quit smoking. Vaping is a [95% less harmful](#) alternative to conventional cigarettes.

Lack of knowledge about alternatives and wrong perspectives on harm

- 33% of smokers in France and 43% in Germany say vaping is as harmful or more harmful than cigarettes.
- 6% of smokers in France and 21% of smokers in Germany say they don't know what vaping is.
- In both countries 11% of smokers perceive cigarettes as the least harmful product.
- 37% in France and 40% in Germany say vaping should be regulated in the same way as traditional cigarettes, and about 10% say that it should be regulated more strictly compared to traditional cigarettes.
- More than half of smokers in both countries would like to learn more about vaping.

Misinformation about vaping is widespread. Even though it is well established that it is less harmful than smoking, even a substantial amount of smokers are

misinformed. This is a massive problem for public health. This hinders millions of smokers from switching to less harmful alternatives. Therefore, we need science-based risk communication addressed to smokers, but also to the general public and health practitioners. Additionally, risk-based regulation is needed to make less harmful alternatives more appealing to smokers.

Misconceptions on nicotine

- 69% of smokers in France and 74% of smokers in Germany believe nicotine causes cancer.
- The majority of doctors have a negative attitude towards nicotine because of its addictive potential and consider it harmful to health.
- A minority of doctors have a neutral or positive attitude to nicotine and say it is relatively harmless and/or mention positive effects.
- Only a few doctors are aware of any recent studies on nicotine or its benefits, but almost all doctors are interested in such studies and would like to know more about it.

People consume nicotine, but they die from smoking. Many consumers and doctors mistakenly believe that nicotine causes various illnesses, while it is proven that the many other toxins involved in smoking are the ultimate culprit. This misinformation prevents many smokers from switching to vaping and prevents doctors from recommending it to smokers, which has detrimental effects on public health. The British National Health Service follows a pragmatic approach towards nicotine consumption and vaping by stating that: “While nicotine is the addictive substance in cigarettes, it’s relatively harmless. Almost all of the harm from smoking comes from the thousands of other chemicals in tobacco smoke, many of which are toxic.”

Traditional smoking cessation fails

- More than half of smokers would like to quit smoking. About four-fifths of smokers in both countries have tried to quit smoking
- 44% of smokers in France and 22% of smokers in Germany have tried nicotine replacement therapy.
- 29% and 45% of smokers in France and Germany respectively haven’t

received any doctor's advice on smoking. 30% of smokers in France and only 15% of smokers in Germany say that the doctor's advice on smoking has been helpful.

- 62% of smokers in France and 53% in Germany believe anti-smoking policies ignore how difficult it is to stop smoking.
- Almost all the doctors in both countries still recommend nicotine gums, patches, and/or pastilles. There is no unanimous opinion about the effectiveness of these tools and alternatives such as vaping.

The data clearly show that most people who want to quit smoking fail and many smokers feel that anti-smoking policies are ignoring this fact. Therefore, we must give people as many options as possible to find their own best way to quit. This must include vaping and other harm reduction products. Doctors must be incentivized to also consider new nicotine products.

Vaping as a smoking cessation aid

- About half of respondents in both countries (54% in France and 51% in Germany) believe the ritual of inhaling is the main reason why they continue to smoke.
- Nevertheless, many doctors don't recommend vaping because it "doesn't break the habit".
- 43% of smokers of traditional cigarettes in France and 25% in Germany also regularly vape. The higher share of dual users in France seems to cause French smokers to smoke fewer cigarettes a day compared to German smokers.

Smokers are not satisfied with traditional cessation methods and therefore look to vaping as a means of quitting. One of the main reasons why vaping works as a cessation method is the fact that it retains the ritual of smoking, but lowers the health risks at the same time. Smokers' addiction is based on a combination of nicotine and other ingredients of tobacco smoke together with conditioned behavior [the so-called 'smoking ritual'] like the coffee break, the inhalation process, or even placing something between the lips. Therefore, it is worrying that doctors seem to focus more on the ritual than the harm it causes.