

Untangling knotty policy problems: a case study of developing an e-cigarette policy position statement

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Introduction/Issues: E-cigarettes have become an increasingly polarising issue within the alcohol, tobacco and other drug sector. Developing a policy position, for advocacy, requires the careful balancing of competing needs and interests including different clinical orientations; the imperatives of health justice against the demands of public health; the concerns of diverse population groups, and the availability of sometimes incoherent legislative levers. Furthermore, this occurs against the backdrop of an evidence base that is, in many respects, still in its infancy.

Method/Approach: Devising a narrative that was able to acknowledge the complexities of the issue, while skilfully avoiding become entangled within the knotty policy problem that e-cigarettes present, was key to fulfilling ATODA's advocacy role, as the peak body of alcohol, tobacco and other drug services in the ACT, while respectfully representing member organisations with diverse views that run the gamut of treatment/abstinence to harm reduction.

Key Findings: The policy position statement that ATODA collaboratively developed forms the basis of the organisation's advocacy on tobacco and e-cigarettes at a time of rapid legislative change and has been used to inform media talking points, in discussion with legislative and bureaucratic bodies and as the basis for future submissions.

Discussions and Conclusions: ATODA's policy position statement on e-cigarettes and tobacco speaks to current complexities while offering some possible ways through a complex legislative landscape.

Implications for Practice or Policy (optional): The work that went into devising the policy position statement provides a potential template for how individual organisations and peak bodies might effectively grapple with similarly divisive issues in alcohol, tobacco and other drug policy.