

Vaping industry participation standards in health research organisations: An exploratory policy content analysis.

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Introduction: The vaping industry employs similar tactics to tobacco industry actors to seek credibility and distort scientific evidence around nicotine vaping product harms. As industry interests undermine vaping control efforts, policy safeguards are necessary to protect against this. We aimed to explore health research organisation (HRO) policies on vaping industry participation in their activities in Australia.

Method: This mixed-methods study integrated policy analysis and informant surveys to obtain vaping industry participation policy information from HRO stakeholders. Organisation type, policy type and vaping and tobacco industry focus, and respondent role were recorded. We identified themes describing organisational allowances, constraints, and rationale for industry research participation using Framework analysis.

Findings: Organisations identified in Australia for policy searching (n=156) provided 47 unique policy documents. Stakeholders from eligible HROs (n=267) further provided 31 survey responses. Research organisations and universities were highly represented in policy and survey data. Most HRO stakeholders recognised that vaping industry interests counteract public health priorities and opposed their participation. Five themes were identified: 1) lack of vaping specific or inclusive policy, 2) addressing few participation allowances, 3) inconsistent discourse on financial conflicts, 4) conflict of interest as a rationale against participation, and 5) participation stance being informed by evidence.

Conclusion: To support the emerging evidence base around vaping harms which inform vaping policy, HROs require strong, comprehensive policies to resist vaping industry participation in research. Those lacking clear vaping industry participation policies is an underused public health lever for counteracting industry influence. Strong participation policies can support the integrity of the evidence on vaping harms, which informs vaping control and legislation.

Implications for practice or policy: We recommend developing and updating HRO research participation policies to directly address vaping industry participation, and to consider how such policy addresses vaping industry interests beyond this falling within tobacco industry focused participation policy.

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