

HEALTH

'Vaping should be part of plan to reduce harm'

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THE South African economy would benefit significantly from an inclusive harm reduction strategy that drove economic transformation, said Asanda Gcoyi, the chief executive of Vapour Products Association of South Africa.

Gcoyi said this would drive transformation by introducing policies that would deal with the country's multiple socio-economic imbalances, starting with fair vaping industry regulations, and acknowledging vaping as a less harmful alternative to smoking cigarettes.

South Africa joined other global states in commemorating World Vape Day on Monday.

"Despite acknowledgement by the government that harm reduction is a tool to limit the damage caused to individuals and communities who have succumbed to the temptation of substances in its National Drug Master Plan, the country still finds itself without a clearly defined and inclusive harm reduction strategy.

"Emerging economies, including South Africa, are faced with many socio-economic and environmental challenges, including the extensive availability of harmful substances and disposable waste," said Gcoyi.

"This puts a strain on the country's public health system and environmental well-being due to the increasing number of non-communicable diseases, such as cancer and tuberculosis.

"Harm reduction strategies are needed more than ever to help manage, prevent and identify negative behaviour, including nicotine addiction associated with harmful substances."

Vaping Saved My Life, a consumer advocacy group, conducted a social experiment among eight participants who were challenged to use vaping as a way to give up smoking over a 90-day period.

Each participant was given a choice of equipment and e-liquids, based on their flavour preferences, and asked to document their journey on Twitter.

After the first two weeks, almost half of participants shared that they were struggling with cravings, but nearly a third said that vaping helped with the yearning.

By the sixth week, almost all participants had stopped smoking cigarettes. Just under a third of participants reported that the withdrawal experience "wasn't bad".

At the eight-week mark, the participants described the ways in which vaping had helped, with responses that included "My lungs feel better because vaping doesn't burn your lungs", to "Vaping helps with cravings", "Vaping is not as addictive as smoking" and "Vaping is convenient".

By week 10, all participants had quit cigarettes and all were experiencing benefits in some way, including being less out of breath, saving money, feeling healthier and sleeping better.

Slightly less than a third had begun recommending vaping to their friends. At the end of the 90-day challenge, the participants had all managed to stop smoking completely. The participants all said that they felt vaping was less addictive than smoking, while more than four-fifths said they felt that vaping was less harmful to their health.

Dr Sharon Nyatsanza, the deputy director of the National Council Against Smoking, said World No Tobacco Day, also commemorated this week, called on governments and policy makers to step up legislation, including implementing and strengthening existing schemes to make producers responsible for the environmental and economic costs of tobacco product waste.

"Governments and policy makers should support tobacco farmers to switch to alternative, more sustainable livelihoods to reduce the environmental impact of tobacco growing, curing and manufacturing, while continuing to implement tobacco control measures," Nyatsanza said.