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Department of Health Portfolio Committee members during the public engagement

Dozens of community members attended the public hearing at eNseleni community hall

Association calls for separate e-cigarette regulations

Mbuso Kunene

EQUATING vaping with smoking, as in current legislation, fails to protect the interests of smokers.

This was expressed by the Vapour Products Association of South Africa (VPASA) at a provincial public hearing on the Tobacco Products and Electronic Delivery Systems Control Bill held at eNseleni community hall on Friday.

The Bill is a vital updated draft legislation that seeks to protect the health of all South Africans by regulating the use, packaging and marketing of tobacco and electronic delivery systems, including e-cigarettes.

VPASA has consistently advocated for a balanced, science-based Electronic Delivery Systems Bill that recognises and promotes harm reduction rather than obstructing it.

The association's CEO, Asanda Gcoyi said such a Bill should protect both the interests of minors and smokers who are looking for alternatives without necessarily seeking to quit.

"These public hearings are a crucial opportunity to shape vaping regulations and the future of harm reduction in South Africa. It is an opportunity for the vaping public, public health specialists and the vaping industry to work collaboratively with Parliament to craft workable regulations that clearly distinguish smoking from vaping through differentiated regulations that account for the respective harms of the different products," said Gcoyi.

According to Gcoyi, South Africa has roughly 12.8 million active smokers, with 50% of tobacco users dying from smoking-related illnesses while vaping was 95% harmless and a quitting mechanism to be considered by the department in its public health strategy.

Meanwhile, Lorraine Govender, national manager of health programmes at Cansa, said provisions of the Bill were in line with international best practices on the regulation of tobacco products.

KZN smoking increase

In KZN, the Global Adult Tobacco Survey-South Africa (GATS-SA) marks the smoking prevalence at 21.7%, while an Africa Centre for Tobacco Industry Monitoring and Policy Research study showed that smoking rates in KZN had increased significantly from 14% to 20% between 2017 and 2021.

Measures in the new Bill close loopholes in the Tobacco Products Control Act of 1993, as amended, and are set to reduce tobacco use, exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke, as well as the initiation of tobacco use by young people.

It brings South Africa's domestic legislation closer to full implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), a global standard.

The proposed legislative and policy changes seek to introduce the following:

(a) Indoor public places and certain outdoor areas will be designated 100% smoke-free

(b) A ban on the sale of cigarettes through vending machines

(c) Plain packaging with graphic health warnings and pictorials

(d) A ban on display at point of sale; and the regulation and control of electronic nicotine delivery systems and non-nicotine delivery systems.

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