

Headline: [WATCH] Why is the tobacco industry comparing vapes to HIV treatment?

Blurb: Public health experts agree with the vaping lobby that smokers need more help to quit. They disagree, however, with the industry's argument that imposing a sin tax on vapour products will lead down a similar path as the state-sanctioned Aids denialism of former President Thabo Mbeki's administration.

- Public health experts agree with the vaping lobby that smokers need more help to quit smoking.
- They disagree, however, with the industry's argument that imposing a sin tax on vapour products will lead down a similar path as the state-sanctioned Aids denialism of former President Thabo Mbeki's administration.
- A third of a million people died between 1999 and 2008 because the government refused to buy HIV treatment for state facilities based on the unfounded belief that Aids is not caused by HIV, and that treatment was poisonous.

Joan van Dyk, Dylan Bush

South Africa will impose a sin tax on vaping products from 2023.

Proponents of vaping products say that this could have a deadly impact on smokers who can't quit.

Why?

Because sin taxes make products more expensive, which means many smokers won't be able to afford the devices.

Instead, they'll keep using cigarettes which are deadly.

The controversy:

If such a policy goes through, the vaping lobby says the government will be guilty of a human rights violation akin to Aids denialism.

What is Aids denialism?

Between 1999 to 2008, the South African government largely denied that Aids was a disease caused by a virus called HIV.

The government portrayed AZT as poisonous and even claimed that it caused Aids.

It was by then a proven antiretroviral treatment.

As a result, a third of a million people died unnecessarily.

Most of these people used government facilities since antiretrovirals were available in the private sector.

Is taxing vapes just as bad?

Public health experts, ethicists and lawyers say no.

First of all, the government didn't have any treatment plans for HIV in the Aids denialism days.

For tobacco-related illnesses there are treatment strategies contained in the country's plan to fight noncommunicable diseases such as diabetes and lung cancer.

From that research they know that there are very few smokers in South Africa (only 6%) who can't or won't quit.

It is therefore only 6% of smokers who will be affected if vapes become more expensive.

The authors found this isn't enough to greenlight vaping for the entire population.

With HIV, not a single person who used the public sector could access treatment.

However, the health advocates and the vaping industry agree on one thing:
More must be done to support smokers who want to quit.

Advocates say legislative changes (such as a sin tax) don't go far enough to support those who want to stop smoking.

With HIV the only form of treatment available was ARVs – and it wasn't available.

If you wanted to quit smoking, there are many options you could try that don't use e-cigarettes.

- Nicotine patches
- Nicotine replacement therapy
- Cessation clinics