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## About the Strategic Harm Reduction Dialogue

For two years, a group of experts who have devoted their careers to reducing tobacco use met in a process they called The Strategic Dialogue on Tobacco Harm Reduction. The vision of this group is a world in which virtually no one uses cigarettes.

## About this policy brief

This policy brief summarizes some of the recommendations made by members of the Dialogue. A full report is available online in the peer-reviewed journal *Tobacco Control* (first posted February 24). The document recommends helping tobacco users who are unable or unwilling to become nicotine-free to shift to the least harmful nicotine products.

The Dialogue process was led by Dorothy Hatsukami, Ph.D., director of the University of Minnesota TTURC, and Mitchell Zeller, J.D., a former associate commissioner of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and currently a health policy expert with Pinney Associates, and Dorothy Hatsukami, Ph.D., director of the University of Minnesota TTURC. It was jointly funded by the American Legacy Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the University of Minnesota Tobacco Use Research Center.

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## Toward a world where no one uses cigarettes: Recommendations from the Strategic Dialogue on Tobacco Harm Reduction

Amid the reality that tobacco use remains the leading preventable cause of death and disease in this country, one fact remains decidedly disturbing: left unchecked, tobacco use in this century will claim an estimated one billion lives—a 10-fold increase over the 20th century.

For two years, a group of scientific and policy experts, most of whom have devoted their careers to reducing tobacco use, convened in a process called The Strategic Dialogue on Tobacco Harm Reduction. From their meetings came a blueprint for action to realize a singular long-term vision: *a world in which virtually no one uses cigarettes.*

What follows is an encapsulated version of the group's recommendations. Their conclusions represent various ways to regulate tobacco products based on public health needs.

### Background and purpose

Recent products offered by the tobacco industry claim reductions in exposure to toxic chemicals in tobacco smoke and oral tobacco. Some of these products make implied or direct claims to reduce the risk of cancer or other diseases. However, public health experts caution that these claims have not been scientifically substantiated.

Such misrepresentations can lead to misperceptions about the safety of so-called "reduced harm" products can result in greater tobacco use.

The purpose of the Strategic Dialogue report was to outline key elements of a science-based regulatory program and policies that can dramatically reduce tobacco-related harm.

### Recommendations

The report concludes that product regulation is a critical component in the efforts to reduce harm associated with tobacco use. It also recognizes that the tobacco harm reduction approach that leads to the greatest reduction in tobacco-related morbidity and mortality is the cessation of use of all tobacco products.

The members of the Strategic Dialogue concluded that in order to dramatically reduce tobacco harm, we must have the long-term vision of virtually no cigarette use. Toward the realization of this long-term vision, the group identified two short-term policy objectives: (1) effective public health-based regulatory control of all tobacco products and (2) institution of comprehensive policies to shift current tobacco users who are unable or unwilling to become nicotine-free toward the least harmful products—e.g., medicinal nicotine cessation

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## Members of the Strategic Dialogue on Harm Reduction

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aids—which are far safer than any nicotine-containing tobacco product.

Specific recommendations include the following:

- Regulation of all aspects of promotion, advertising, and labeling of tobacco products
- Prohibition of claims touting reductions in exposure to harmful components in tobacco or smoke unless sufficient evidence indicates that risk has been reduced as well
- Regulation of harmful compounds in all tobacco products
- Accurate education of the public regarding the relative risks of different nicotine-containing products
- Higher taxes on cigarettes
- Expanded anti-tobacco advertising
- Strong programs to encourage and support tobacco cessation

The Dialogue also recognizes the “continuum of risk” principle. Within this continuum, cigarettes are regarded as the most harmful tobacco product, and medicinal nicotine products such as nicotine gum and patches are less harmful than oral tobacco products.

## Conclusions

The strategic dialogue blueprint is a call to alter the current marketplace to reduce the number of people who use cigarettes. As the group has recognized, several issues require further research before specific policy changes could be recommended or implemented. These issues involve questions regarding the long-term use of safer nicotine and whether reducing the nicotine content of cigarettes to non-addicting levels could lead to an actual reduction in smoking prevalence. The Dialogue members also acknowledge that application of some of the recommendations may not apply in some countries. However, although deliberations of the dialogue were focused on the United States, some of these principles could have world-wide applicability.

*To read the full report discussed in this policy brief, please see Zeller M, Hatsukami D, and the Strategic Dialogue on Tobacco Harm Reduction Group. The strategic dialogue on tobacco harm reduction: a vision and blueprint for action in the United States. Tobacco Control. Published Online First: 24 February 2009. doi:10.1136/tc.2008.027318*