

Vaping: Does the American Lung Association Have a Financial Conflict of Interest?



By Cameron English — December 6, 2019

The ALA does not approve of e-cigarettes, despite the fact that thousands of smokers have used them to quit. Is their reluctance to acknowledge the utility of e-cigarettes due to a financial conflict?



Credit: Public Domain/Wikipedia [1]

I bought my first electronic cigarette (e-cigarette, e-cig) in 2012. After a month of smoking and using an e-cig (vaping), I finished off my last pack of Camels and gave up tobacco forever. There are [thousands of Americans](#) [2] who have followed that same path to a smoke-free life.

If you ask the American Lung Association (ALA), though, my vaping compatriots and I must not exist, because the anti-tobacco group says e-cigarettes don't help smokers quit. As Fox Business [reported on December 5](#) [3]:

While the e-cigarette industry tells smokers falsely that switching to their products is safer and can help them quit, the American Lung Association is urging the [U.S. Food and Drug Administration](#) [4], which regulates nicotine-vaping products, to 'crack down' on these false quit-smoking claims,' the group said.

While it's true the e-cigarette industry encourages smokers to drop their deadly habit in favor of

vaping, so do many independent medical experts who've seriously considered the evidence—which indeed shows that e-cigarettes are safe, effective smoking cessation devices.

If anyone is advancing “false quit-smoking claims,” it's the ALA and its allies in the tobacco control industry. Let's examine the association's case against e-cigarettes to see how it stands up to the data.

The association [warned smokers](#) [5] that the FDA has not found any e-cigarette to be a safe and effective tool for ending an addiction.

If that's the case, the FDA doesn't know how to use a search engine. Thirty seconds on Google turned up this [2018 article](#) [6] published in the *British Medical Journal*, which noted that more than 50 percent of e-cigarette users in the UK are ex-smokers. The authors concluded from this and other statistics that “the limited evidence available suggests e-cigarettes containing nicotine may help people stop smoking.” A 2016 systematic review of the available evidence on e-cigarette use likewise reported that the devices appear to aid [smoking cessation efforts](#) [7]:

One particularly large survey reported 81% complete smoking substitution with a median time of e-cigarette use of 10 months. Furthermore, a longitudinal study of e-cigarette use reported that daily users of e-cigarettes were 6 times as likely as nonusers/tryers to report quitting. The results of the first prospective 12-month randomized controlled trial, suggest that e-cigarettes help combustible tobacco smokers reduce or abstain from use.

There's [more clinical and epidemiological data](#) [8] we could cite, but it's clear from the personal testimonies (submitted voluntarily and without compensation) and peer-reviewed research that e-cigarettes help many smokers quit. Even more critical studies find that e-cigarettes are “at least as effective as nicotine patches. E-cigarettes are also more attractive than patches to many smokers” according to a [2013 article](#) [9] published in *The Lancet*. Interestingly, the ALA [endorses nicotine patches](#) [10] as “safe and effective” for smoking cessation, so it's unclear why the association would discourage use of an equally (and probably more) effective option in e-cigarettes.

Fox Business also [reported](#) [3], “The association warned smokers that research has shown the devices contain dangerous metals and toxic chemicals” Little needs to be said here since ACSH has debunked this claim [dozens of times](#) [11]: e-cigarettes contain these “dangerous metals and toxic chemicals” in far lower quantities than traditional cigarettes, which is why [multiple studies](#) [12] have found that vaping is roughly 95 percent safer than smoking.

The American Lung Association could do a lot of good by following the science and endorsing e-cigarettes for smoking cessation, as the [American Cancer Society](#) [12] and* several other influential research organizations have. The fact that the ALA hasn't is frustrating and difficult to explain, though Boston University public health expert Michael Siegel has offered [one plausible explanation](#)

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It appears that the American Lung Association is only prepared to acknowledge that a person has quit smoking if that person quits the way the ALA wants them to quit: using FDA-approved medications produced by Big Pharma companies with which the ALA has a [financial relationship](#) ^[14]”

**Update on 9-Dec-2019 @ 9:04 pm PT: The American Cancer Society has rescinded their endorsement of e-cigarettes.*

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- [10] <https://www.lung.org/stop-smoking/join-freedom-from-smoking/quit-dont-switch.html>
- [11] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2019/10/10/vaping-facts-myths-and-health-risks-14325>
- [12] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2019/08/08/long-term-vaping-effects-unknown-separating-science-hype-e-cigarette-debate-rages-14211>
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