

# Review of: "[Commentary] The WHO strategies to reduce tobacco-related deaths are insufficient"

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**Potential competing interests:** I serve as an expert witness in litigation against cigarette companies for which i receive payment.

Lars Ramstrom is a giant in the field of tobacco control who during his career has carefully documented the changing tobacco product marketplace in Sweden over the past four decades noting the shift from smoked to oral tobacco and the subsequent decline in tobacco related deaths, now the lowest in Europe. His commentary mentions these work, and similar shifts in the marketplace of tobacco products now happening in other regions of the world including other Nordic countries such as Norway and Iceland, US, Japan, England and other jurisdictions. An important lesson learned from the past is that treating all tobacco/nicotine products as equivalently harmful is counterproductive to public health as it only serves to protect the most lethal nicotine product – cigarettes. The evolving marketplace of lower risk nicotine products combined with regulatory authority over tobacco products represents a new opportunity to dramatically transform the cigarette business in ways that were never imagined when the war on tobacco was raging decades ago. However, this requires public health authorities such as WHO and others to embrace risk-proportionate regulation, taxation policies, and providing consumers with accurate public messaging on product relative risks. A regulatory framework based on sound science that encourages and rewards new or existing manufacturers to invest in consumer acceptable lower risk products to replace cigarettes needs to be encouraged. To date the WHO has largely rejected the science which ironically is delaying a more rapid reduction in the use of deadly combustible tobacco products. Lars Ramstrom commentary should be read by all governments attending the upcoming WHO FCTC conference of the parties. The way to the future is to follow the science and ignore those stuck in the past. Lives hang in the balance.