

## Evidence to the HSSPS committee on the Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill

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### **Introduction**

1. BMA Northern Ireland is both a Professional Association and a Trade Union which represents the medical profession in Northern Ireland across all Branches of Practice and our mission is, *'we look after doctors so they can look after you.'*
2. BMA has 169,000 members worldwide, and 75% of doctors and medical students are members in Northern Ireland.
3. BMA Northern Ireland welcomes this Health (miscellaneous provisions) Bill and our focus will be on Part 1: sale of nicotine products and tobacco. As you are aware, BMA Northern Ireland has a long history supporting comprehensive tobacco control measures and our goal is for a tobacco free society by 2035. We believe that a wide range of measures are need to achieve this goal and we fully support this Bill.
4. The chief medical officer in his annual report <sup>1</sup>shows that although smoking rates have reduced from 29% in 1998-99 to 22% in 2013-14, it remains the single greatest cause of preventable deaths in Northern Ireland, killing around 2,300 people each year.

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<sup>1</sup> CMO (2015) *Your health matters: Annual report of the chief medical officer for Northern Ireland 2014*. Belfast. DHSSPS

5. In relation to young people, between 2000 and 2013, the proportion of children aged 11 to 16 years who had ever smoked declined by almost two thirds from 37% to 13%. There are a number of concerns around the rising popularity of e-cigarettes, namely the aggressive promotion and marketing of e-cigarettes which has led to their increased awareness and use by children and young people. This was highlighted by a recent YouGov survey which found that 10% of young people have tried e-cigarettes (up from 7% in 2013). There is a need for a strong regulatory framework to ensure the necessary controls are in place to protect children and young people.
6. It is widely recognised that the health risks associated with e-cigarette use are likely to be significantly lower than the well-established risks associated with smoking tobacco, and BMA Northern Ireland recognises their potential for supporting tobacco harm reduction. There is, however, a lack of robust research and evidence in this area, and any public health benefit is not yet well established. There remains a lack of conclusive evidence as of the effectiveness of e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation aid, and concerns regarding the safety and variability of the components of e-cigarette vapour. BMA Northern Ireland supports regulating e-cigarettes as licensed medical products, as this best reflects their use for harm reduction, would bring them in line with existing nicotine replacement therapy products, and ensure their effectiveness, quality, and safety.
7. BMA has published, '*Promoting a tobacco-free society*<sup>2</sup>,' and this paper summarises our position on the future of tobacco control and what measures are needed to move towards a tobacco-free society in Northern Ireland. Our goals for a tobacco free society are based on: policy and legislative changes; education and information; smoking cessation and tobacco industry accountability.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://bma.org.uk/search?query=Promoting%20a%20tobacco-free%20society>

8. We believe the clauses outlined in this Bill will assist in working towards a long-term goal of a tobacco free society. We are proposing the inclusion of two additional amendments to achieve this goal and these are outlined below.

#### **Additional clauses and recommendations**

##### **E-cigarette retailers**

9. BMA Northern Ireland believes that e-cigarettes and their refills should be an age restricted product and therefore an additional clause is needed in this Bill to amend the Tobacco Retailers Act (NI) 2014 to include those selling e-cigarettes. This enables support and advice to be directed at those trading these items to avoid illegal sales and enable easier enforcement of the law.

##### **Smoking in cars**

10. BMA Northern Ireland is recommending that an additional clause is added to this Bill to prohibit smoking in private vehicles carrying children under the age of 18.
11. Further consideration should be given to extending banning smoking in all private motor vehicles regardless of the age of the driver and passengers.

**ENDS**

**10 December 2015**