

Global sale of tobacco products and electronic nicotine delivery systems in community pharmacies

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ABSTRACT

Objective To estimate the proportion of countries/territories that allow sales of tobacco products and electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) in community pharmacies.

Methods International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) member organisations were contacted by email and asked to respond to a two-item survey assessing whether their country/territory allowed sales of (a) tobacco products and (b) ENDS in community pharmacies.

Results Of 95 countries/territories contacted, responses were received from 60 (63.2%). Seven countries (11.7%) reported that tobacco products were sold in community pharmacies, and 11 countries (18.3%) reported that ENDS were sold in community pharmacies.

Conclusions Among the FIP member organisations, there are few countries that allow the sale of tobacco products and ENDS in community pharmacies, with ENDS being more likely than tobacco products to be sold.

INTRODUCTION

Despite more than 50 years of compelling research establishing its detrimental effects, tobacco use remains an international epidemic.¹ Although creative and aggressive tobacco control approaches can yield meaningful progress, the competing challenges are numerous. For example, tobacco-producing countries receive revenue from tobacco sales, retail outlets for tobacco are ubiquitous, clinicians fail to address tobacco use during care encounters and access to effective medications for cessation is limited in many low-income and middle-income countries.^{2,3} Being at the point of sale for cessation medications, pharmacists could have a meaningful role in assisting patients with quitting; however, the sale of tobacco products in some pharmacies undermines and contradicts this role while also failing to advance the social denormalisation of tobacco use.

Numerous counties, cities and municipalities within the USA (eg, in California and Massachusetts) prohibit the sale of tobacco products in pharmacies.^{4,5} Further, one national pharmacy chain in the USA removed tobacco from its shelves in 2014.⁶ Despite these advances, the vast majority of pharmacies in the USA continue to sell tobacco. In Canada, legislation enforced the removal of tobacco from pharmacies in all but one province (British Columbia).⁷ Outside of North America, less is known regarding the sale of tobacco products in pharmacies.^{8–10} Until now, no studies have characterised the extent to which electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) are permitted to be sold in pharmacies. As such, the objective of this study was

to estimate the proportion of countries that allow the sale of tobacco products and ENDS in community pharmacies.

METHODS

A list of all member organisations of the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) was obtained (n=131, representing 48% of countries and territories worldwide). One country was excluded because no email address was available. Founded in 1912, FIP is a non-governmental, global body representing pharmacy and pharmaceutical sciences. Through partnership with the WHO and its extensive global pharmacy and pharmaceutical sciences network, they represent more than three million pharmacists and pharmaceutical scientists around the world and serve to support the development of the pharmacy profession. Each member organisation of FIP designates an official contact to represent their organisation in communications with FIP, and these contact persons frequently respond to surveys relevant to the professional practice of pharmacy. If the survey questions are outside of the specific expertise of the official contact person, these member organisations are well connected locally to obtain accurate information.

In December 2014, the designated official contact person for each member organisation received an introductory email from the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) describing the research project, and 1 week later, respondents received an email with a link to a brief, web-based survey composed of two items (response options: 'yes,' 'no,' 'I do not know'):

1. In your country, are tobacco products (eg, cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, bidis, cigars, hookah tobacco, snus) allowed to be sold in community pharmacies, including those located within larger stores such as supermarkets?
2. In your country, are electronic nicotine delivery products (eg, e-cigarettes, e-hookah, hookah pen, vape pens or pipes) allowed to be sold in community pharmacies, including those located within larger stores such as supermarkets?

The two survey items were carefully reviewed by investigators (US and international-based collaborators) to ensure that the wording would be relevant to all countries and would be interpretable given the potential for language barriers. Up to five reminder messages were sent to non-responders. These originated from either the research centre (UCSF) or the membership centre (FIP): at 1 week (UCSF), at 4 weeks (UCSF), at 5 weeks (FIP), at 8 weeks (FIP) and at 11 weeks (FIP). If multiple responses were received from a country/territory, these were examined for



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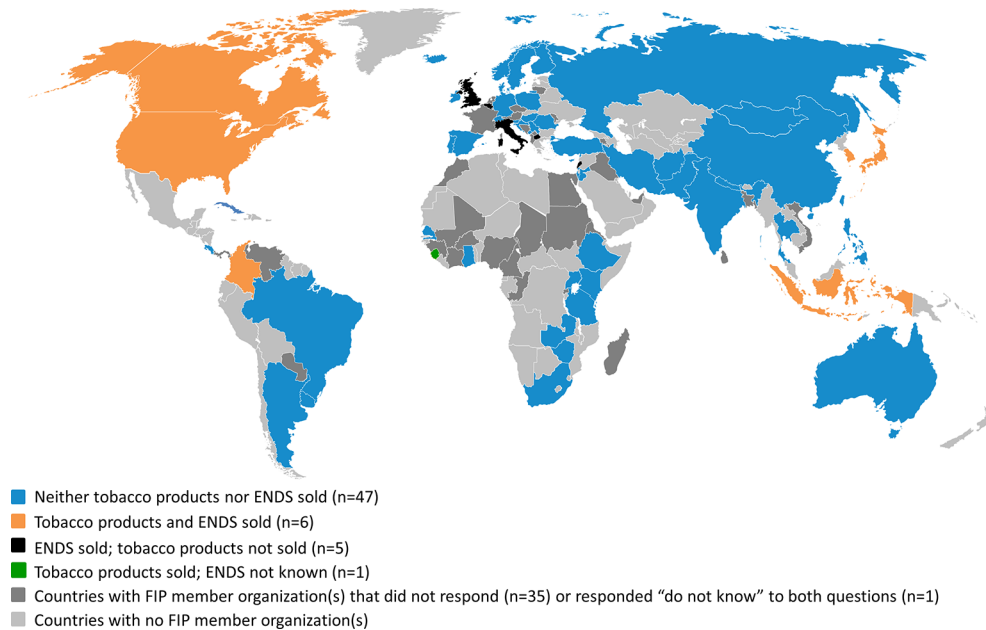


Figure 1 Sale of tobacco products and electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) in community pharmacies, December 2014. FIP, International Pharmaceutical Federation.

consistency. A final draft of the paper was sent to all FIP member organisations for review and verification of the data representing their country.

RESULTS

Of 95 countries and territories with one or more FIP organisations, 60 responded to the survey (63.2%; see figure 1 and online supplementary table). Representatives from seven countries (11.7%; Canada, Columbia, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Sierra Leone, USA) reported that tobacco products were allowed to be sold in community pharmacies. Nigeria responded 'I do not know.' In 11 countries (18.3%; Belgium, Canada, Columbia, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Korea, Lebanon, Macedonia, UK, USA), ENDS were allowed to be sold in community pharmacies. Nigeria and Sierra Leone responded 'I do not know.'

DISCUSSION

For decades, issues surrounding the sale of tobacco products—and, more recently, ENDS—have been a topic of debate within many segments of the pharmacy profession.¹¹ Within the USA, numerous professional organisations oppose the sale of tobacco products in community pharmacies,¹² and the American Pharmacists Association has adopted a formal policy statement against the sale of e-cigarettes in pharmacies 'until such time that scientific data support the health and environmental safety of these products.'¹³ Representing the global perspective, FIP has been vocal on this issue and has actively advocated for the role of pharmacists in promoting a tobacco-free future,¹⁴ which includes but is not limited to encouraging pharmaceutical organisations to diligently pursue policies to ensure that 'tobacco products are not sold in pharmacies, and that licensing bodies should not license pharmacies that are located in premises in which such products are sold.'¹⁵ As a first step towards understanding its pervasiveness, this study investigated policies regarding the sale of tobacco products and ENDS in community pharmacies worldwide.

The results of this survey study suggest that among FIP member organisations, the proportion of countries that allow the sale of tobacco products in community pharmacies is somewhat low.

However, an estimated 153 616 community pharmacies in these seven countries (including only British Columbia in Canada) collectively serve a total of 8.13 million people.^{16–18} An estimated 201 863 community pharmacies serve a total of 9.82 million people in the 11 countries that allow sales of ENDS.¹⁶

Because pharmacists are highly accessible to the public in many countries, they can play an important role in tobacco cessation and control. However, this role is undermined by the sale of tobacco products and ENDS, the latter of which currently are not indicated for smoking cessation—although some countries, such as the UK, advocate for their use in cessation in individuals who have tried other methods without success.¹⁹ Eliminating sales of these products in healthcare settings would serve to promote social denormalisation of tobacco use by fully eliminating the inherent contradiction between selling tobacco while providing health-related goods and services.

This study was the first to examine global policies about the sale of tobacco products and ENDS in community pharmacies. These data can inform future efforts towards legislation and the development of interventions for pharmacists worldwide to (a) educate patients and broader communities about the risks of smoking and ENDS use and (b) assist patients with quitting. Limitations include sampling of only countries/territories with FIP member organisations and a survey response of 63.2%. Furthermore, the data were obtained from organisational representatives, and while believed to be accurate, these were not verified independently. Some countries do not have a uniform policy throughout—if the products were permitted to be sold in any jurisdiction within a country, that country was classified as positive for sales, and in these instances, the results would be overstating pervasiveness of tobacco and/or ENDS sales in pharmacies. However, it must be noted that policy and practice do not always align. For example, in at least one Central American country (Guatemala), an estimated 94% of community pharmacies do not sell tobacco, despite the fact that this is not strictly prohibited.⁸ These are limitations of a global study for which language is a potential barrier to more complicated surveys that could have been devised to more carefully dissect the varying policies across and within countries.

To curb the global public health impact of tobacco use and to reverse the epidemic, attention to tobacco control efforts worldwide is paramount. Further global research is warranted to estimate the proportion of all tobacco sales that occur via pharmacies, the extent to which evidence-based medications for cessation are available and affordable for patients, as well as the impact of pharmacy-based cessation programmes.

What this paper adds

- ▶ The sale of tobacco products contradicts the role of the pharmacist in promoting health and assisting patients with tobacco cessation.
- ▶ The extent to which tobacco products and electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) are permitted to be sold in pharmacies globally is unknown.
- ▶ The proportion of countries that allow the sale of tobacco products in community pharmacies is 11.7%. The proportion of countries that allow the sale of ENDS in community pharmacies is 18.3%.

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Competing interest None declared.

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