



Hollings Cancer Center
An NCI-Designated Cancer Center

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May 10, 2021

Mr. Michael Bloomberg
Founder
Bloomberg Philanthropies
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Dear Mr. Bloomberg,

Tobacco control: the danger of doing more harm than good

We write as independent experts in tobacco science and policy, including several cited in a recent article in the Chronicle of Philanthropy. The article, *Bloomberg's Millions Funded an Effective Campaign Against Vaping. Could It Do More Harm Than Good?* by Marc Gunther raises several concerns about the overall impact of Bloomberg Philanthropies' investments in tobacco control, in particular the opposition to tobacco harm reduction as a public health strategy.¹ We are aware of the response to the article, but we do not think this adequately addressed the concerns raised.^{2 3}

The concerns raised in the article have real foundations, and we urge you to re-examine assumptions and the evolving evidence in this field. Your famous injunction "*In God we trust. Everyone else, bring data*" is a good one, and should be a universal maxim in philanthropy. But it implies a reciprocal obligation to be open to challenging data and to pursue philanthropic aims with a restless curiosity about what works, what does not work, and the plausible perverse consequences of well-intentioned interventions.

To this end, we would welcome an opportunity to present data to you that could prompt some strategic reflection on Bloomberg Philanthropies' approach to tobacco control, specifically its opposition to tobacco harm reduction. We support the MPOWER model of tobacco control, but we believe the tobacco harm reduction approaches are complementary to MPOWER, not an alternative or in any way undermining.

We must do everything possible to find pathways for people who smoke to quit. Vaping products and other non-combustibles are, beyond reasonable doubt, far safer than cigarettes and function as economic substitutes. Therein lie tremendous opportunities to reduce the burden of smoking-related non-communicable diseases – the desired outcome we all share. While we share the concerns about

youth vaping, we believe a more nuanced approach to the data is necessary to understand the impacts of vaping on young people, given what we know of the patterns of youth vaping and smoking. We have to make good policy judgements that limit to the extent possible youth access to nicotine products, while doing all we can to address the public health imperative to prevent both adult and adolescent smoking. We are very concerned that policies designed to crack down on e-cigarettes will have the unintended and harmful effect of protecting the cigarette trade and promoting smoking. Ignoring or dismissing the opportunity to avoid many premature adult deaths would, in our view, be profoundly unethical.

Our proposal is to send a small expert delegation to meet you privately and in person if possible, to make a short data-orientated presentation, and to discuss the issues that arise. This would be a private meeting for you to engage with and test data and ideas that suggest a different approach to tobacco control may now yield great benefits.

Bloomberg Philanthropies has made an enormously positive contribution to global public health. Our purpose in suggesting a meeting is to put data, analysis, and ideas to you that could be transformational in tobacco control if adopted globally.

We would be grateful if you could let us know how you would like to proceed.

We are copying this letter to Patricia Harris (Chief Executive) and Kelly Henning (Public Health Program Lead) at Bloomberg Philanthropies, and to Howard Wolfson, Senior Adviser to Mr. Bloomberg.

Yours sincerely,



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References and links

- ¹ Marc Gunther. *Bloomberg's Millions Funded an Effective Campaign Against Vaping. Could It Do More Harm Than Good?* The Chronicle of Philanthropy, March 23, 2021. Available here: <https://bit.ly/3dG1Djz>
- ² Kelly Henning (Bloomberg Philanthropies), Matthew Myers (Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids), Robin Koval (Truth Initiative), *Vaping and Philanthropy: Debating Strategies That Work*, Letter to the Editor, The Chronicle of Philanthropy, March 29, 2021. Available here: <https://bit.ly/3tD5S4S>
- ³ Please see a critique of the response at (2) above: Clive Bates, *The Counterfactual*, April 1, 2021. Available here: <https://bit.ly/3tldEdS>