

BAT SA's 4 key principles to prevent underage access to tobacco, nicotine products

BAT South Africa (Batsa) continues to reinforce its commitment to preventing underage access to tobacco and nicotine products, outlining four key principles to protect young people while supporting adult smokers who wish to transition to less harmful alternatives.



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The company emphasised that tobacco and nicotine products are for adults only and advocated for progressive regulation that allows adult smokers, who would otherwise continue to smoke, to switch completely to smokeless products while implementing strong safeguards to prevent underage access.

Speaking on the topic of World Vape Day (30 May) and World No Tobacco Day (31 May), Dr Edward Makgotlho, area head of Scientific Affairs at BAT sub-Saharan Africa, emphasised that BAT South Africa supports stronger measures to prevent underage access to tobacco and nicotine products in South Africa saying: “Effective regulation can aid in reducing smoking rates by encouraging adult smokers to switch to less harmful alternatives, whilst ensuring that these products remain out of reach for anyone underage.”

Key principles to prevent underage access

Batsa supports the following measures to ensure tobacco and nicotine products remain out of reach for underage individuals:

1. **Prohibit underage use:** Outlaw the sale and use of tobacco and nicotine products by and to underage individuals.
2. **Age verification:** Mandatory age verification at the point of purchase or delivery.

3. **Flavour restrictions and responsible marketing:** Allow adult-oriented flavours and restrict flavour descriptors, and packaging uniquely appealing to underage individuals.
4. **Robust enforcement and sanctions:** Prioritisation of effective enforcement underpinned by robust and tailored sanctions for those who break the rules.

The role of smokeless products in harm reduction

Twenty years after e-cigarettes first became available, a range of smokeless products – including vapes, heated products, and nicotine pouches – are now accessible to adult smokers. These products do not burn tobacco and produce significantly fewer harmful chemicals than cigarette smoke.

Countries that have adopted these products, such as Japan, New Zealand, Sweden, the UK, and the US, have observed greater reductions in smoking prevalence compared to those relying solely on traditional tobacco control measures.

“Sweden provides compelling evidence of tobacco harm reduction’s effectiveness. Over the past 30 years many Swedes have switched from smoking to using snus – a traditional oral tobacco product. More recent other smokeless products have been introduced and are taxed based on their lower risk profiles, making them more affordable than cigarettes,” said Dr Makgotlho.

With a smoking prevalence of just 5.4% – the lowest in the EU – Sweden also reports the lowest mortality rates for smoking-related cancers. Scientists estimate that 3.5 million lives could be saved over the next decade if the EU achieved similar outcomes.

“BATSA is guided internally by BAT’s global Responsible Marketing Principles, which place strict controls on what and how it markets its products – over and above in-market regulation. However, regulatory reform is needed to address the issue of underage access across the industry,” he explained.

“Two decades ago, tobacco control was the sole strategy to combat the health risks of cigarette smoking. Nowadays, adult smokers who might continue smoking should have the option to transition to alternatives that pose a lower risk.

“The compelling scientific evidence underscores the effectiveness of harm reduction approaches, and I am convinced that by adopting these strategies, we can expedite the journey towards building a smokeless world.”

Building a smokeless world

BAT recognises the harm associated with smoking cigarettes and is committed to reducing the health impact of its business by offering adult smokers, who would otherwise continue to smoke, a portfolio of smokeless products with a lower risk profile than cigarettes.

The company’s global ambition is to become a predominantly smokeless business by 2035.

In South Africa, BAT supports collaboration between regulators, manufacturers, retailers, and public health organisations to prevent underage use while ensuring adult smokers have access to smokeless products and accurate information about their risk profiles relative to smoking.

“Tobacco harm reduction represents one of the most significant public health opportunities. If implemented

with well-thought-out regulation, tobacco control and harm reduction measures can work together to reduce tobacco harm,” said Dr Makgotlho.

BAT recently launched Omni, a platform to share ideas and evidence to drive the dialogue on tobacco harm reduction. Join the conversation [here](#).

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