

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES TO REACH THE TOBACCO ENDGAME

# Making tobacco industry elimination inevitable

ELINE GOETHALS, THE SCHOOL FOR MORAL AMBITION

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# Executive Summary

The tobacco industry's products kill 7 million people annually while generating \$880 billion in revenue—more than Google, Meta, and Apple combined. Despite decades of tobacco control progress, the industry is adapting faster than regulations can evolve, pivoting to new nicotine products while maintaining their addiction-based business model. **The time has come to move from controlling tobacco to eliminating the industry entirely.**

**The problem:** The industry operates like a Hydra—when advertising was restricted, they shifted to digital marketing. When cigarettes faced regulation, they pivoted to e-cigarettes and nicotine pouches. Traditional tobacco control was never designed to eliminate the tobacco industry itself. By focussing on controlling rather than eliminating tobacco products, advocates are doing exactly what the industry wants: giving them the space to establish new nicotine markets.

**The solution:** The "tobacco endgame" represents a fundamental shift from reducing harm to permanently ending the source of harm. This report defines tobacco endgame as "a concrete plan to end all activities of the tobacco industry with a specific timeline and strategy tailored to each region's needs." Far from being utopian, countries including New Zealand, Ireland, and Finland have already set ambitious elimination targets with specific dates.

Strong public support already exists: on average 72% of the public supports phasing out commercial cigarette sales, and 71% of Dutch youth believe the nicotine industry should not be allowed to exist. The gap isn't in public willingness, it's in awareness that elimination is achievable through policy.

**The challenge:** Current tobacco endgame messaging suffers from three critical weaknesses: inconsistent definitions, lack of cohesive narrative and limited awareness of the full range of endgame strategies.

**The strategies:** This report provides 14 strategic recommendations for more effective tobacco endgame communication to build political will. The recommendations address how advocates can better coordinate internally, engage policymakers directly, and normalize the concept publicly - all working toward the same goal of making tobacco industry elimination politically inevitable.

**Key actions:** Position endgame as targeting all nicotine products. Focus on the industry as the culprit. Use "realistic" language, never "radical." Always lead with evidence of overwhelming public support. Frame each policy by how it eliminates industry power.

**The imperative:** Tobacco industry elimination is inevitable. Their business model depends on addiction and deception. As long as this remains intact, the industry will continue finding new ways to create and maintain addiction. The tools, evidence, and public support for tobacco endgame exist. What's needed now is coordinated messaging to make tobacco industry elimination inevitable. The century of profiting from addiction is over. The tobacco and nicotine industry must be done.

# 1. Author's intro

This report stems from my seven months exploring the tobacco control field with an unusual background: advertising. Inspired by Rutger Bregman's book *Moral Ambition* in May 2024, I left my job creating advertising campaigns to address what Bregman calls "Big Problems" - urgent global challenges in need of talent, in the search of a more impactful existence.

**The School for Moral Ambition identified the tobacco epidemic as one of the world's most urgent yet neglected problems.** Anyone working in tobacco control knows that there is far too little investment in fighting this extremely wealthy industry. In September 2024, I joined nine other fellows from diverse backgrounds to receive training before embedding with key tobacco control organizations.



My experience with tobacco control was very limited, yet one experience proved revealing. Early in my career at an advertising agency, I had to work for a Big Tobacco brand and saw how they blatantly request creative ideas to bypass regulations and encourage social sharing among youth. Even with all advertising regulations in place, the agency still came up with an unexpected campaign and channel to get teens to smoke more. This showed me the industry's deviousness and how they leverage their wealth to exploit loopholes.

Within weeks of starting my fellowship, I was stunned. I had completely underestimated the scope and impact of this issue. My understanding of health consequences had been limited to linking lung cancer with smoking, but I soon learned about effects ranging from medication absorption to reproductive health. Even more shocking was discovering tobacco companies' continued influence in policymaking, despite regulations prohibiting industry involvement.

It's unbelievable that so much suffering stems from a handful of companies and their wealthy shareholders. **Wealth creation for a few is winning over health creation for all**, driving social inequality and environmental damage.

I had the chance of being placed at the Institute for Global Tobacco Control at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Working with Dr. Joanna Cohen, who has dedicated her professional career to tobacco control, inspired this paper on the need for better narratives around the tobacco endgame. I'm deeply grateful for her welcome, inspiration, and guidance, as well as to Chris Bostic and Megan Manning of Action on Smoking and Health USA for their ongoing support.

By the end of this report, I hope to have convinced you that abolishing the tobacco industry is not only possible but necessary, and how improving our narratives help accelerate this goal. Working towards elimination is the only way to stop this Hydra-like industry - Hydra, the dragon for which every head cut, three more grow. The tobacco and nicotine industry repeatedly prioritize profit over public health, and ending their existence with support for those addicted, is the only way forward.

Let's dive in.

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# 2. Context: the need for industry elimination

## ‘Isn’t smoking a problem of the past?’

That was the question a close friend asked when I started working in tobacco control in September 2024. I’ll be honest - I wasn’t entirely sure either. While vaping seemed on the rise, I thought the major battles against tobacco were over in many parts of our world. I could not have been more wrong.

In 2005, the World Health Organization (WHO) achieved a landmark victory: the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), a global public health treaty to reduce tobacco’s harmful effects, came into force. The treaty, which currently has 182 ratifying countries, created powerful momentum. Building on this, the WHO introduced MPOWER in 2008 - a concrete policy package offering six cost-effective, high-impact measures to reduce tobacco use. The implementation of MPOWER showed promising results: smoking rates dropped in many countries. **Despite fierce tobacco industry opposition, public health victories kept coming. Until around 2015.**

**Since then, the world’s momentum in reducing tobacco use has decelerated.** Global smoking rates have continued to decline — from 22.8% in 2007 to 17.0% in 2021 — but the pace of the progress has noticeably slowed in some regions (WHO, report on Global Tobacco Epidemic, 2023). The situation is even more alarming in low- and middle-income countries, where progress in reducing tobacco use is slower, and population growth risks offsetting gains in prevalence reduction. **This stagnation isn’t limited to smoking rates - it extends to policy action.** Since 2020, fewer countries have adopted new tobacco control laws, and progress on implementation has slowed markedly (WHO, paper on Global Tobacco Epidemic, 2025).

**To make matters worse, the tobacco industry is working relentlessly by launching a larger product portfolio,** from nicotine pouches to e-cigarettes - often marketed as safe options for quitting smoking. In reality, these are heavily promoted to youth, and it is working: vaping rates are on the rise (Salari et al., 2024).

Not everything is doom and gloom, progress is still happening. Some jurisdictions are winning battles, from raising age limits for tobacco purchases to expanding smoke-free zones. However, each new policy proposal faces intense tobacco industry opposition. It often takes years of advocacy to pass a law, and even then, Big Tobacco deploys litigation to reverse them. We are far from eliminating the death and disease caused by their products.

**Today, we stand at a critical inflection point.** A well-funded, globally coordinated nicotine industry is pushing new products and challenging regulation at every turn, while tobacco control organizations struggle with insufficient resources to fight back. Many lack the funding and capacity to advocate for and support governments in developing effective policies. At the governmental level, there’s a concerning lack of political will as tobacco is not seen as a priority (IGTC, 2024).

**This creates a dangerous power imbalance.** Advocacy groups and health experts risk being excluded from key policy conversations—not due to lack of expertise, but due to structural underinvestment and a growing global trend where governments are making it harder for NGOs and independent experts to participate in policymaking (CIVICUS Monitor, 2024). Public health systems and organizations remain chronically underfunded while the industry deploys billions to maintain their stranglehold on policy.

## How bad is it really?

- Tobacco kills more than 7 million people every year - of which 1.3 million are people who never smoked themselves but were exposed to secondhand smoke (WHO, report on Global Tobacco Epidemic, 2025).
- For perspective: the annual death toll exceeds the entire global death toll from COVID-19 (7 million deaths in total) - yet we don't treat this preventable epidemic with the same urgency. Tobacco is not an ordinary consumer product. No other product kills up to two thirds of the people who use it exactly as intended (Banks et al., 2015).
- The addictive power of nicotine is staggering: as one can become enslaved to tobacco products often within a matter of days (DiFranza et al, 2000). It can take up to 30 attempts to quit smoking and many people never succeed (Chaiton et al, 2016).
- In Europe, youth e-cigarette experimentation doubled from 10% (2016) to 20-25% (2024), with average initiation at just 13.5 years (Salari et al, 2024). 70% of British youth who vape have also tried smoking cigarettes (Royal College of Physicians, 2024).
- Government income from tobacco taxation never outweighs the societal and care costs. For example: in Belgium alone, while the government collected €2.64 billion in tobacco taxes in 2012, the societal costs of smoking (including health care, lost productivity, and lost years of healthy life) exceeded €13 billion. This equals a burden of approximately €1,400 per Belgian adult (BELSPO, 2016).

## The tobacco industry is undermining progress more than ever.

For context: the tobacco industry is dominated by just four multinationals ('Big Tobacco' or 'Big 4'): Philip Morris International, Japan Tobacco International, British American Tobacco, and Imperial Brands. The fifth largest manufacturer, China National Tobacco Company mostly sells domestic, but export is ramping up. Many alternative nicotine products - heated tobacco (e.g. IQOS), nicotine pouches (e.g. ZYN), and e-cigarettes (e.g. VUSE) - are either created or acquired by the Big 4.

**Big Tobacco's scale is staggering:** The global market generates \$880 billion in annual revenue, which is more than Google, Meta, and Apple combined (\$825b) (Grand View Research, 2024; Apple, 2023; Alphabet, 2023; Meta, 2023). Nicotine products are incredibly profitable. In 2018, six major tobacco corporations made \$55b profit - exceeding the combined profits of Coca-Cola, Pepsico, Nestlé, Mondelez, Fedex, General Mills, Starbucks, Heineken, and Carlsberg (Branston et al, 2021).

While the world has to spend trillions on tobacco-related costs, the tobacco industry rakes in massive profits year after year. These companies don't only fight life-saving tobacco control measures, they actively drive youth tobacco uptake, damage the environment and despite their claims of moving away from cigarettes, continue to make and sell more than 6 trillion cigarettes annually. 6,000,000,000,000 per year or 190.000 cigarettes per second (Expose Tobacco, 2024).

**The industry's history is marked by deception, lies, and manipulation.** They've lied under oath to the American Congress, created fake “consumer protection groups” to fight tobacco legislation, and bought pharmaceutical companies to profit from people suffering from COPD (STOP, 2024). The list of tobacco industry interference is too long for this document. The University of Bath is currently doing an incredible job of keeping track of interference tactics on their website [tobaccotactics.org](http://tobaccotactics.org).

**So why has progress slowed down since 2015?** The answer is straightforward: intensified tobacco industry interference combined with a spectacular image overhaul. Big Tobacco has doubled down on their strategies while rebranding themselves as “part of the solution” through newer products like e-cigarettes and snus. This strategy began most prominently with the 2016 Philip Morris announcement of their new “brand purpose” (“delivering a smoke-free future away from cigarettes”) while continuing to profit massively off their cigarette sales (STOP, 2024).

The industry is increasing their presence at prestigious global forums like Davos, there is a troubling revolving door between government and industry positions, and more and more expanded corporate social responsibility activities to improve image and gain access to officials (Health Policy Watch, 2023). The Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index provides concrete evidence of this intensification, showing that 43 countries have experienced deterioration in their ability to protect health policies from industry influence (Global Tobacco Index, 2023).

The industry has heavily invested in science and research, strategically using this research to **position their novel products as harm reduction tools rather than for genuine public health benefit** (Hendlin et al., 2024). They've now evolved into a multi-addiction business, expanding beyond commercial tobacco to include alternatives, cannabis, and even pharmaceutical products (Tobacco Tactics, 2024).

## Our tobacco control efforts manage symptoms, not the root cause.

The tobacco control movement has achieved remarkable victories through traditional measures like MPOWER. Smoking rates have declined, smoke-free policies have become the norm, and tobacco taxes have increased globally. Yet despite these successes, we face a fundamental problem: **the tobacco industry adapts faster than our regulations can evolve.**

The tobacco industry operates like the mythical Hydra—cut off one head, and three more grow back (Hendlin et al., 2024). When advertising was restricted, they shifted to digital platforms and influencer marketing. When health warnings were mandated, they redesigned packages to minimize impact. When smoking was banned indoors, they created heated tobacco products and claimed they don't produce “smoke.” When combustible cigarettes faced heavy regulation, they pivoted to e-cigarettes, pouches, and other new products.

This isn't accidental, it's the predictable result of trying to regulate an industry whose core business model depends on deceit and addiction. As long as the fundamental business model remains intact, the industry will continue to find new ways to create and maintain addiction. With their massive annual revenue, there's every incentive to stay ahead of regulators.

While MPOWER policies have saved millions of lives and protect over 6.1 billion people, smoking prevalence in many countries remains well above the 5% target commonly associated with tobacco endgame goals (WHO, 2025). Even jurisdictions that have fully implemented all MPOWER measures continue to face ongoing tobacco- and nicotine-related health burdens. This reflects MPOWER's strength as a demand-reduction tool, but also highlights its structural limitation: it was not designed to eliminate the tobacco industry itself (Hendlin et al., 2024).

We're reaching the inherent limits of an approach that tries to manage an industry built on addiction rather than eliminating it entirely. Every new regulation becomes a business challenge for the industry to solve, not a barrier to their fundamental operations. And when stakeholders believe comprehensive change cannot happen, they settle for incremental progress that preserves industry power.

## From controlling tobacco to abolishing it

**The fundamental question is: why do we still put up with entirely preventable death and disease?**

In a way, these deaths, diseases, and massive investments in public health to combat tobacco harm should never have happened in the first place. Unlike food, water, or medicine, commercial tobacco and nicotine serves no beneficial purpose for human survival or well-being. It is a wholly artificial need, created and sustained for the sake of profit.

The industry privatizes all the profits while society bears all the risks and costs. This is not like fighting pneumonia or congenital diseases - this health crisis exists solely because tobacco companies and their shareholders prioritize profits over public health. This is not an issue of individual choices, but a systemic problem that requires system-level solutions.

Imagine a world without the tobacco industry. Healthcare costs would plummet by up to \$226.7 billion annually in the U.S. alone (ASH, 2021), and millions of families would avoid premature grief. Resources now treating tobacco-caused illnesses could advance medical research and address other health challenges. The economic burden – estimated to exceed \$1 trillion globally in costs and lost productivity (NCI, 2017) – and community devastation would become history.

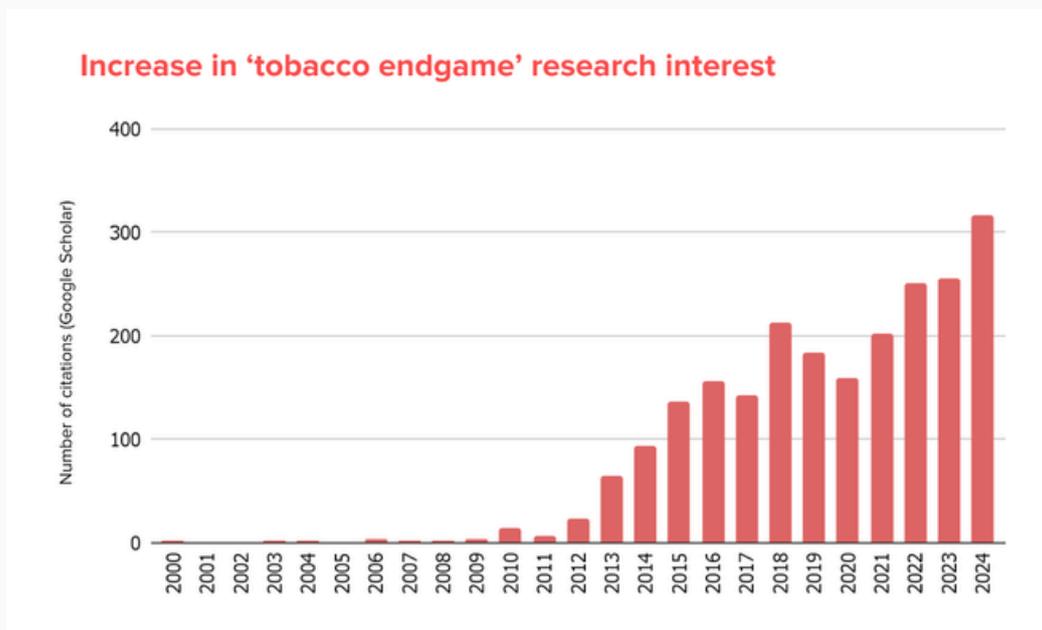
We stand at a crossroads. As the industry doubles down on their strategies, we must respond with equal determination. The time has come to move from merely reducing the tobacco industry's harm to ending the industry altogether - from controlling tobacco to abolishing it. More and more voices in the tobacco control field are calling for the elimination (or 'abolition') of the tobacco industry. **This is not a far-off dream but an actively discussed and in some places implemented concept known as the 'tobacco endgame'.**

# 3. The concept of 'tobacco endgame'

## 3.1 What is the tobacco endgame?

The concept of 'tobacco endgame' represents a fundamental shift in how we think about addressing the tobacco epidemic. While tobacco control has focused on reducing tobacco use through measures like taxation or smoke-free policies, **endgame thinking envisions a definitive end to the tobacco industry. Endgame strategies focus on supply-focussed policies that go beyond conventional demand-focussed approaches** - they include policies like phasing out commercial cigarette sales entirely or reducing nicotine to non-addictive levels.

This concept was developed by trailblazers such as Dr. Ruth Malone, Dr. Ron Borland, Dr. Patricia McDaniel, Cynthia Callard, Neil Collishaw, Dr. Carolyn Dresler, Dr. Stephen Marks and Dr. Robert Proctor. Academic interest in endgame policies has grown significantly since 2014 (figure below, Google Scholar, search conducted Jan 17, 2025), paralleling observations of increasingly aggressive industry interference and stalling progress in smoking reduction.



**Far from being utopian, the tobacco endgame is realistic.** Countries including New Zealand, the Maldives, Ireland, and Finland have set ambitious targets with specific dates for achieving near-zero smoking prevalence. The evidence from early adopters and modelling studies demonstrates that endgame policies can accelerate progress toward eliminating tobacco-related harm.

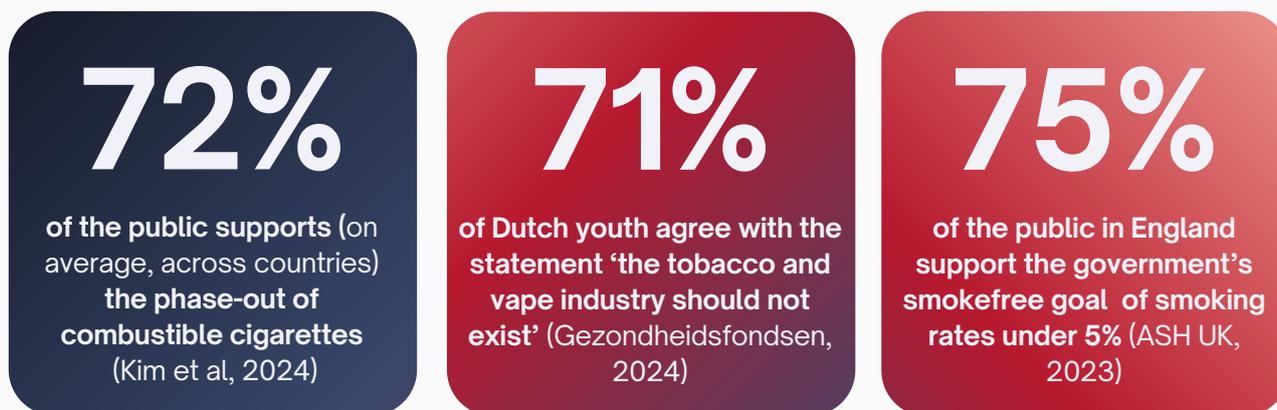
## 3.2 The ‘tobacco endgame’ remains widely unknown.

Public health stakeholders, policymakers and broader communities often lack familiarity with the tobacco endgame concept, limiting broader discussions and support for these transformative measures. The possibility of tobacco industry elimination is not always considered viable, reflecting decades of industry normalization and perceived economic entrenchment.

The endgame concept risks encountering skepticism or being dismissed as "too radical" or "unrealistic." It may seem implausible at first glance, not because it's impossible, but because we struggle to envision alternatives to deeply entrenched systems, even harmful ones.

**This creates a vicious cycle: when a concept remains unknown, it isn't discussed, preventing its normalization.** The perception that industry elimination is impossible becomes self-fulfilling: when stakeholders believe comprehensive change cannot happen, they settle for incremental progress that preserves industry power. Breaking this cycle requires making the end of the tobacco industry a common topic of conversation among an expanding circle of stakeholders. This repeated exposure gradually shifts social norms, and as public support grows, political will typically follows.

**Despite the concept's limited recognition outside tobacco control circles, substantial evidence indicates strong public support for the idea of tobacco industry and/ or product elimination.**



This public sentiment reveals an important insight: the primary gap isn't in public willingness to embrace transformative approaches, it's in awareness that these approaches exist and are achievable on a policy level. Several factors contribute to this awareness gap.

### 01 Inconsistent definitions of ‘tobacco endgame’

What constitutes the 'tobacco endgame' remains debated among experts (therefore creating confusion), with no consensus on whether it means eliminating all tobacco products, ending commercial sales, achieving near-zero prevalence or whether it entails taxation or smokefree multiunit housing policies. There's also no clear criteria for when policy or strategy proposals qualify as 'endgame' in research (McDaniel et al, 2015).

## 02 **Lack of a cohesive narrative**

The lack of a unified narrative diverts advocates' energy toward internal debates rather than unified action against the industry. The industry benefits from and promotes this division among advocates. Another debate benefitting the industry is the tobacco versus nicotine focus in endgame thinking. Some authors focus on tobacco products only, others call for a phase-out of all nicotine products (not always at the same tempo).

## 03 **Wide diversity of potential endgame policies**

Third, the diversity of potential endgame strategies, while actually a strength, can be either unknown or overwhelming without proper framing. People might encounter just a single strategy (like a specific sales ban), find flaws in it, and dismiss the entire endgame concept, unaware of alternative approaches. This prevents understanding that tobacco endgame offers a menu of options adaptable to different contexts and needs (McDaniel et al, 2015).

### **3.3. Our goal: improving awareness and normalization of the 'tobacco endgame' concept**

**What we see, we can believe—and what we can believe, we can achieve. The tobacco industry has maintained its power partly through making its elimination seem unimaginable. But just as we once couldn't envision smoke-free restaurants or airplanes, we must now make tobacco industry elimination visible, believable, and inevitable.**

Speeding up actionable public and political will requires a deliberate approach to shifting the conversation. We want the 'tobacco endgame' to stick in people's minds, to be remembered as something we all should strive for. The objectives of this report therefore are:

1. Increase **recognition that tobacco industry elimination is necessary and inevitable** → Help stakeholders recognize that death and disease will persist as long as the industry exists, as their business model depends on addiction. Frame tobacco endgame as the necessary conclusion to a century of damage. Desired outcome: *"Tobacco endgame is the logical conclusion to decades of tobacco control progress."*
2. Increase **belief that tobacco industry elimination is achievable** → Counter defeatism by showing tobacco endgame is a concrete, attainable goal with proven implementation paths and historical precedents. Desired outcome: *"Tobacco endgame is not a utopian dream, it is a realistic strategy."*
3. Increase the **awareness of the full range of tobacco endgame policies and strategies** → Communicate that tobacco endgame represents a diverse menu of policies and strategies adaptable to different contexts. Desired outcome: *"There are many ways to get to the tobacco endgame, depending on the local context."*
4. Increase the **attraction of tobacco endgame work (and/or efforts)** → Tobacco control is globally underfunded. Endgame thinking could attract talent and investment as tobacco control receives just 0.3% of global health aid, with 97% of funding coming from private philanthropy (NCD Alliance, 2024). This chronic underfunding limits impact and momentum. Desired outcome: *"We should invest more in tobacco endgame across all levels."*

These objectives work together to create reinforcing momentum: clear messaging enables both stronger public advocacy and bolder political leadership, which reinforce each other to make tobacco endgame policies politically inevitable.

### **3.5 Overview of the methodology of this report**

Our systematic approach encompassed an analysis of the 'tobacco endgame' concept from 2013 onwards, utilizing multiple databases and journals (Web of Science, Google Scholar, BMJ, The Lancet, etc). The methodology consisted of:

- A systematic review of academic literature and tobacco control organizations' documentation to compile and analyze varying definitions of 'tobacco endgame', enabling identification of key commonalities and divergences (Goethals, 2025).
- A narrative analysis examining the framing of 'tobacco endgame', with particular focus on identifying dominant discourse patterns and their evolution within tobacco policy discussions (including a review of press articles mentioning the concept and interviews with key stakeholders at multiple tobacco control organizations).
- An extensive inventory of endgame policies and strategies from the literature, coupled with an assessment of policy makers' and researchers' awareness of these approaches (Goethals, 2025).

### **3.6 General recommendations to improve narratives**

Before diving into concrete tobacco endgame recommendations, the following recommendations give an overview of some general strategies and guiding principles for improving narratives towards a broad and non-expert audience. These will give direction to the recommended endgame narratives.

#### **Strategy 1: Tell an emotional story to make it easy to understand and remember.**

Humans are moved by stories, not statistics. While data on tobacco-related deaths and industry profits are important, they rarely catalyze action by themselves. Instead, we must engage people emotionally and inspire them to envision, and fight for, a world without the tobacco industry.

The first chapter deliberately aimed to make you angry at the tobacco industry by highlighting its deception and harm. Now, an important second step, this report hopes to channel your anger into hope by telling stories about how we can win.

This approach corrects a common mistake in advocacy communication. We often assume that people don't care about certain issues because they lack information, so we bombard audiences with the facts, hoping these will speak for themselves. But information without emotion rarely motivates action.

For tobacco endgame communication, this means tapping into emotions such as anger, disgust or hope - ideally there's a combination of both strong positive and negative emotions. It means going beyond reciting research or simulations to telling stories about industry deception and lies, children who will never be targeted by the industry, or communities reclaiming their health.

## **Strategy 2: Avoid complexity and jargon to improve accessibility**

The tobacco endgame concept must be understood by everyone—not just public health experts. This requires prioritizing clarity and accessibility. Using academic language, technical terms, or complex policy explanations creates unnecessary barriers. Too much nuance, while valuable in academic discussions, can dilute the emotional impact. Sometimes a clear, compelling story requires simplifying complex realities. This doesn't mean being dishonest, it means prioritizing resonance over exhaustive detail.

Currently, tobacco endgame narratives risk using inconsistent definitions and technical terminology that makes the concept inaccessible. We should explain necessary technical concepts in straightforward terms. And instead of detailed policy mechanisms, focus on outcomes, how each approach contributes to the ultimate goal of tobacco industry elimination.

When in doubt, choose simplicity—even with "expert" audiences. In reality, even policymakers have limited time and attention. A clear, fully understood message creates a stronger ally than a complex, partially grasped one. Technical details can be provided later as supporting material, but the core message must be immediately accessible to drive change.

## **Strategy 3: Repeat and stimulate conversation to normalize**

Ideas become normalized through repetition and conversation. For tobacco endgame to become widely accepted, it must be discussed consistently across multiple channels and contexts. This repetition creates mental availability: the concept springs readily to mind when people think about tobacco control.

Effective messaging requires disciplined repetition of key phrases. The tobacco industry has mastered this strategy, repeating phrases like "personal choice" and "harm reduction" until they became embedded in public discourse. We must be equally disciplined in repeating our core messages, for example 'the tobacco industry can and must be eliminated for the sake of public health'.

Everyone has a role to play in normalizing the tobacco endgame concept. Whether you're a researcher, advocate, healthcare professional, or concerned citizen, simply talking about tobacco industry elimination as a realistic goal helps shift public perception. The tobacco issue touches all levels of society: from healthcare systems to economic productivity, from environmental sustainability to social equity. By highlighting these wide-ranging impacts, we can help people see their personal connection to the tobacco endgame goal.

Strategic repetition creates political momentum. When tobacco endgame becomes common in conversations and media, politicians begin to see supporting it as safe or advantageous. Ireland's smokefree example shows this shift: some CSOs opposed comprehensive bans in 2003, yet Ireland implemented the world's first ban just one year later, setting a precedent for the rest of the world.

## Strategy 4: Create political momentum through cycles of public support

Political change happens through reinforcing cycles where public support and political leadership strengthen each other. Strong public support gives politicians permission to act boldly, while bold political action normalizes previously 'radical' ideas for the public.

This pattern is visible across successful social changes. Marriage equality gained momentum when early political wins (like Massachusetts legalizing same-sex marriage) demonstrated political viability, which encouraged more public support, which enabled more politicians to take stands. Ireland's smokefree ban followed a similar trajectory: early political leadership shifted public conversation, creating space for comprehensive action.

The tobacco endgame sits at this inflection point. Strong polling support exists but lacks political expression. Early political wins, like Brookline, MA's generational sales ban or the Netherlands' retail phase-out, create proof of concept that enables bolder action elsewhere. Each political success makes the next one easier by demonstrating that endgame policies are both politically viable and publicly supported.

This reinforcing dynamic explains why broad normalization efforts and direct political advocacy must work together. Public conversations create permission for political leadership, while political leadership validates and amplifies public demand.

# 4. Recommendations to normalize tobacco endgame

The following recommendations aim to make the tobacco endgame concept more memorable, effective, and achievable. These recommendations complement and strengthen each other rather than functioning independently. However, just like endgame policies themselves, consider these a 'menu' of approaches to improve narratives, not a checklist to implement simultaneously.

## 1. Find agreement on one definition: 'tobacco endgame' is both a goal and a strategy

The tobacco endgame concept suffers from inconsistent definitions across both academic literature and advocacy communications, varying from measures to target. This weakens its power and limits broader understanding. The tobacco industry benefits when advocates spend endless time debating terminology instead of taking concrete steps toward industry elimination. Don't let definitional debates paralyze action. While clarity matters, perfect consensus shouldn't delay implementation of effective policies.

The word 'endgame' is used in many contexts, from military to chess. It is understood as the 'final phase before something ceases to exist'. In the tobacco control field, 'endgame' is so common that it has become impossible to not use it - however its definition requires clarity.

### What tobacco endgame is NOT:

- A single policy like age restrictions or taxation
- Only about reducing smoking rates in individuals (or using terminology that suggests that such as 'tobacco-free generation') (more on the danger of this framing later on)
- A replacement for existing tobacco control measures
- A utopian dream without concrete implementation paths
- A vague future aspiration without timelines

### What tobacco endgame is:

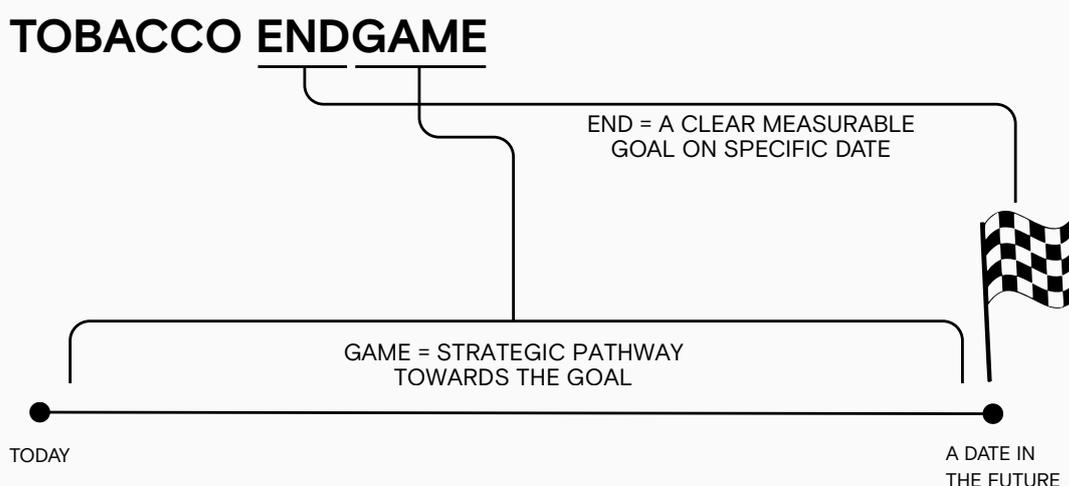
The word 'endgame' itself provides the framework for a clearer definition: two critical components: an 'end' (concrete goal and date) and a 'game' (strategy with policies and tactics to reach that goal).

### 'End': A clear, measurable goal on a specific date

The 'end' component must define precisely what should be ending and by when. The theoretical 'end' in this case could be defined as 'the permanent elimination of the activities of the commercial tobacco industry by a specific date, in a specific jurisdiction'. This framing places the blame on the tobacco industry rather than individuals and creates a measurable endpoint.

Every endgame goal must include 1) concrete targets (Key Performance Indicators) and 2) a concrete timeline. These allow stakeholders to measure progress and hold decision-makers responsible. Endgame targets to date have focused on smoking usage (e.g. “adult smoking prevalence > 5% by 2030”) and therefore center attention on consumer behavior rather than industry activity, ignore underlying power structures, and allow the industry to pivot to alternatives while maintaining their addiction-based business model.

Instead, endgame targets might incorporate industry-oriented metrics such as a complete phase-out of commercial tobacco sales by a specific date, elimination of tobacco industry political influence (e.g., lobbying, campaign contributions), systematic reduction in tobacco retail outlets or mandated industry divestment from nicotine-addiction business models. These allow for clearer storytelling and keep all eyes on the culprit.



**‘Game’: Strategic pathways adapted to local context**

The ‘game’ component recognizes that different contexts require different strategies. Each jurisdiction must assess their situation and select appropriate ‘moves’ to reach the defined end. Local policymakers should focus on permanently dismantling the industry’s power, choosing from a flexible menu of strategies. Some approaches target industry directly, while others work through user behavior or retailer limitations (McDaniel et al, 2015) - see recommendation 3.

**‘Endgame’: The elimination of the tobacco industry AND strategies to get there**

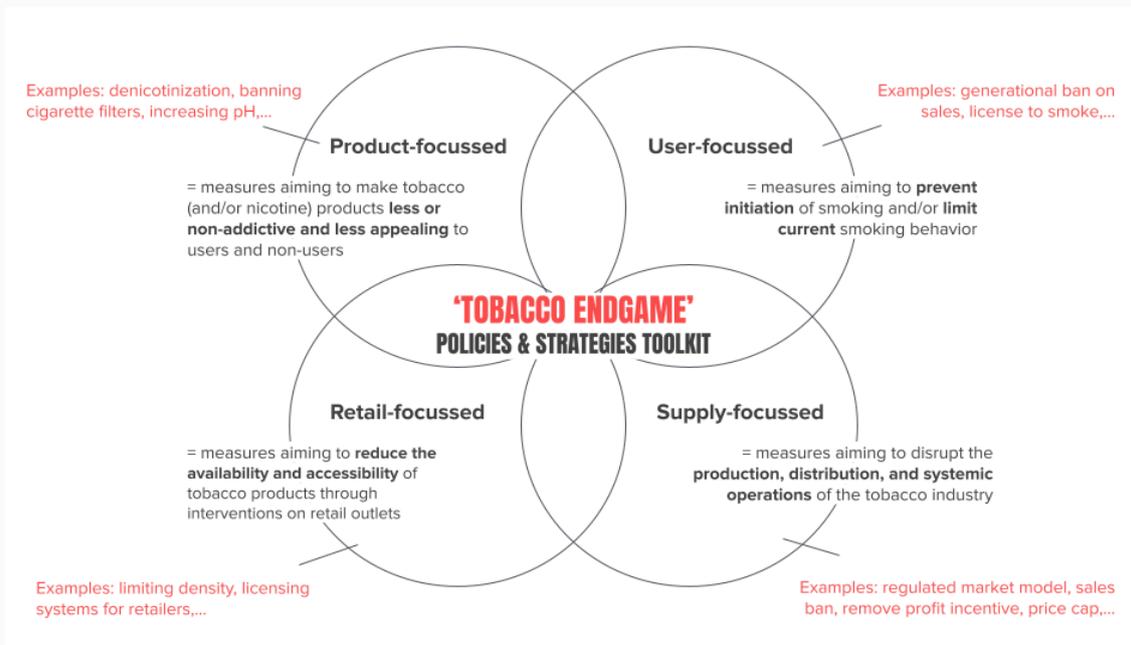
This report recommends to consistently frame the tobacco endgame as: ‘A concrete plan to end all activities of the tobacco industry with a specific timeline and strategy tailored to the specific jurisdiction’s or each region’s needs.’

By emphasizing both the measurable ‘end’ goal and the adaptable ‘game’ strategies, we create a narrative that acknowledges the universal goal and the need for locally-appropriate implementation.

DO	DON’T
Define the endgame as both a goal (‘end’) and implementation strategies (‘game’)	Use vague or inconsistent definitions that weaken understanding
Focus on industry elimination rather than individual behavior change, and frame metrics around industry power dismantling (sales phase-out, political influence elimination)	Frame goals in ways that shift focus from industry to individuals (e.g., ‘tobacco-free generation’) or rely only on consumer-oriented metrics like smoking prevalence rates

### 3. Position endgame as a flexible toolkit, not a single policy

The diversity of endgame approaches reflects their strength as a strategic toolkit rather than a limitation. This expanding menu of policies and strategies allows jurisdictions to select combinations that align with their specific political context, smoking prevalence, and implementation capacity. The categories of endgame policies and strategies illustrated below demonstrate this approach:



When stakeholders dismiss an endgame strategy as 'impossible', we risk them dismissing the entire concept, unaware that tobacco endgame offers diverse approaches adaptable to different contexts.

Emphasize strategic flexibility over specific policies. Explain that endgame represents multiple pathways to permanent industry elimination. Different jurisdictions need different approaches based on political context, smoking prevalence, and tobacco control infrastructure. Modeling studies prove valuable in demonstrating which endgame policies may be more effective in different local contexts (Nghiem et al., 2023).

Correct the "single policy" misconception immediately. When someone dismisses endgame based on one policy they've heard about, acknowledge their concern but redirect to the broader strategic menu. Explain how various policies dismantle different aspects of industry power, allowing policymakers to choose the right combination. This prevents rejecting the entire endgame concept based on objections to individual policies, while demonstrating that endgame thinking is sophisticated and adaptable rather than rigid.

DO	DON'T
Always explain that endgame offers multiple strategic pathways to industry elimination	Present or defend only one specific endgame policy
Acknowledge legitimate concerns about specific policies while redirecting to the broader toolkit	Get drawn into detailed debates about individual policies without establishing the toolkit frame
Emphasize how different approaches work for different contexts	Allow people to dismiss the entire concept based on objections to one policy

## 2. Champion the end date as rallying point

Many countries and jurisdictions have already committed to achieving a "tobacco-free generation" or similar goals—typically defined as smoking prevalence below 5%—by specific dates. **Research reveals that setting clear endgame targets and dates can have positive impacts even before full achievement** (Nip et al., 2024). Early adopter countries with concrete goals significantly accelerated declines in smoking prevalence compared to those without such goals. This suggests that the narrative itself, the commitment to a date, can be a powerful driver of change.

**For jurisdictions with existing end dates: make them visible and meaningful.** Transform abstract policy commitments into concrete moments that create urgency and accountability. Create ongoing campaigns around your target date—whether it's called "Tobacco Liberation Day," "Tobacco Industry-Free 2030," or another memorable milestone. Track, publicize and champion progress toward the goal, making success measurable and visible to the public. Use modelling to warn for when the end date and goal are misaligning with political actions.

For jurisdictions without end dates: make this a priority. There is no tobacco endgame without an end date. Advocates should push governments to commit to specific timelines, as these create the urgency and accountability that vague aspirations cannot provide.

Use deadlines to counter industry delay tactics. The tobacco industry benefits from endless debate and vague timelines. A concrete date forces action and prevents the industry from running out the clock on public health progress. When stakeholders commit to specific dates, it becomes much harder to abandon or indefinitely postpone necessary action. Deadlines also create political accountability, making delay tactics visible to voters and providing clear benchmarks for measuring political progress.

DO	DON'T
If your jurisdiction has a target date, actively campaign about it and track progress rigorously (including modelling studies)	Let existing commitments remain abstract policy documents without public visibility
If your jurisdiction lacks a target date, prioritize pushing for one	Accept indefinite timelines or vague future aspirations

## 4. Position tobacco endgame as targeting all nicotine products - not just tobacco

As revealed in a recent study (Hendlin et al, 2024), tobacco corporations have deliberately pursued a strategy they call "pharmaceuticalization" – transforming themselves into pharmaceutical-like companies that market alternative nicotine products. Internal documents show that tobacco companies planned this transition not as a sincere effort to reduce harm, but to "ensure profitability and regain social acceptance" as they faced increasing regulation and denormalization.

**Evidence of this strategic deception is overwhelming.** Internal documents reveal that in countries not yet saturated with cigarettes, the industry continues promoting their deadliest products because "there is still money to be made in commercial cigarettes." If they truly cared about harm reduction, they would stop aggressive cigarette marketing in developing countries.

By focusing tobacco endgame efforts only on tobacco products, we are doing exactly what the industry wants us to do. While advocates debate cigarette policies, the industry has already pivoted to their next generation of addiction products. They are not waiting for cigarettes to be banned—they are proactively building their nicotine empire through vapes, heated tobacco products, and nicotine pouches. We have to be vigilant about this strategy and not get distracted.

**This is not a future threat—it is happening now.** Philip Morris International invested \$832 million in 2024 alone for ZYN nicotine pouch facilities. Reynolds American is expanding nicotine pouch production capacity. The industry is betting billions on non-tobacco nicotine products while we debate whether to include them in endgame strategies.

The industry's own logic exposes their deception. New nicotine products are often framed as "harm reduction tools" to help people quit smoking cigarettes. If these truly exist to help people transition away from cigarettes, then by the industry's own logic, there would be no need for these "harm reduction" products once cigarettes are eliminated. The complete phase-out of combustible cigarettes automatically justifies the phase-out of all other commercial nicotine products.

Tobacco endgame must be framed from day one: our goal is not merely eliminating cigarettes, but permanently ending the commercial tobacco industry's ability to profit from addiction in any form—whether through cigarettes, vapes, heated tobacco, nicotine pouches, or whatever product they invent next. However: the pace at which a jurisdiction phases out these different types of products can differ based on local context.

We cannot leave the door open for new manipulations of the industry. Every time we create separate strategies for different products, we give them time to establish new markets. The endgame is about ending an addiction-based business model, not managing individual product categories.

DO	DON'T
Position endgame as eliminating all nicotine products in the long term, not just cigarettes. And use market growth data to show the industry's strategic shift is succeeding	Allow endless debates about which products to include - exactly what the tobacco industry wants
Focus the narrative on ending addiction-based business models in all forms	Create separate endgame narratives for different product categories (or just not mention other products at all)

## 5. Aim all eyes on the culprit, not on the victims

We know smoking is not a personal failing, but a deeply complex issue that traps individuals in a cycle constructed by the tobacco industry. The addictive power of nicotine creates dependency far beyond individual willpower. Those who smoke are victims of a system engineered to create and maintain addiction. Unfortunately, some policymakers continue to use the ‘individual choice’-frame, overlooking Big Tobacco’s systemic manipulation.

This frame critically undermines tobacco endgame discussions. As research (Hoek et al, 2022) demonstrates, if smoking is framed as individual choice, the imperative for structural changes to tobacco markets becomes less apparent. In other words: tobacco endgame acceptance and normalization hinges on tackling the ‘individual choice’-frame. These two frames are mutually exclusive.

Tobacco endgame is about supply-side policies, not demand-side approaches such as restricting tobacco marketing or establishing smoke-free zones. Although these policies have achieved remarkable progress, they accept the industry’s continued existence. Yet as long as this industry remains, it will continue to create and maintain addiction through new strategies.

Tobacco endgame advocates risk falling into a rhetorical trap, framing these policies around protecting youth or denormalizing the act of smoking. This approach, even though mostly well intended, mistakenly centralizes individual behavior rather than centralizing the industry’s manipulative infrastructure.

In everything we say, we have to focus on the central role of the industry and how tobacco endgame gradually eliminates their power, ultimately leading to full elimination. Staying out of the individual-choice-frame and fighting it where necessary, is essential here.

Industry-focused framing also creates political permission for bold action. Politicians can position themselves as protecting constituents from corporate exploitation rather than restricting personal choices, making leadership politically advantageous rather than risky.

DO	DON'T
Focus on the industry as the culprit and emphasize systemic manipulation	Frame smoking as individual choice or personal failing, no blame or criminalization
Center narratives on eliminating industry power and manipulation and how policies do this step by step	Center narratives only on protecting specific groups (e.g. youth as focus, as if it’s okay to kill adults) or denormalizing smoking behavior
Center the industry and their conscious manipulation and therefore responsibility in everything you say.	Use terms such as ‘tobacco epidemic’ which implicitly say ‘uncontrollable virus’, yet there’s a clear culprit here

## 6. Frame each policy by how it eliminates parts of industry power

Building on the above recommendation, how we talk about endgame policies is just as important as the policies themselves. We need to win political will. When discussing policies some advocates focus primarily on health benefits or changes in consumer behavior. While these outcomes matter, this misses a crucial opportunity: the most compelling way to **frame endgame policies is to explicitly connect them to the systematic dismantling of industry power.**

This framing requires a deliberate three-step approach, in a simple ladder-shaped structure:

1. Open with a shocking fact about the industry: start by highlighting a specific, concrete and relevant example of industry deception or manipulation, showing how they harm health and/or society. This immediately focuses attention on the true culprit and creates emotional engagement.
2. Then, explain how the specific policy will strip away industry power: clearly articulate which aspect of industry influence or power the policy targets and how it will permanently weaken it.
3. Only then, briefly describe the policy mechanics: after establishing the first two points, explain how the policy works, simply and accessibly.

For example, instead of saying: "A tobacco-free generation policy will protect young people from nicotine or tobacco products," try this approach: *"The tobacco industry has launched a smart vape, a device on which you play a game and take more puffs to get to a higher level. These vapes are often filled with shocking levels of nicotine, increasing the odds of addiction. The tobacco-free generation policy cuts off the industry's power over new customers by making it illegal to sell any products to those born after a certain date. This gradually puts the industry out of business for good."*

**Some endgame strategies target the industry more directly than others.** As we've covered, there are several categories of endgame strategies and policies. The 'supply-oriented category' (e.g. regulated market models, price caps, sales bans, sunken cost policies,...) is most promising for effective framing as these directly target the industry rather than users or products.

According to Dr. Anna Gilmore (IGTC, 2024), this category of policies may also be the most effective in practice, yet they receive less attention worldwide. This is likely because they operate at a more fundamental level and can seem too complex. We need to give these policies more attention and development; consider this an open call to action.

The above framing ladder addresses a fundamental challenge in advocacy: your policy is not your message. We must talk about what policies will achieve, not just what the policy is called or how it works. When asking people if they support banning tobacco sales to anyone below a certain age, many will agree. However, when framing it as never having the tobacco industry preying on young people again, many more will agree. A popular tagline to promote the generational sales phase-out is 'At what age do you want your kids to start smoking? If never, join us in ending the industry.'

**By consistently anchoring each policy discussion in how it dismantles industry power,** we make the endgame concept more coherent and compelling. This approach also makes it harder for the tobacco industry to co-opt our terminology. They've already claimed terms like "smoke-free" and "harm reduction" that originated from public health. Our new definition of tobacco endgame, centered on eliminating industry power, makes it impossible for them to use the term while continuing their business model. This framing also helps politicians position themselves advantageously: they become champions protecting citizens from corporate harm rather than regulators restricting choices.

<b>DO</b>	<b>DON'T</b>
Always begin policy discussions by identifying which aspect of tobacco industry power the policy targets	Focus primarily on how policies affect consumer behavior
Use concrete examples of tobacco industry manipulation that the policy will address	Get lost in technical policy details before establishing the power-dismantling frame
Connect each policy to the larger goal of systematic tobacco industry dismantling	Discuss policies in isolation without connecting them to the endgame goal
Support further development of tobacco industry ending policies	Use language that could be co-opted by industry (like "harm reduction" or "transformation")

## 7. Leverage tobacco industry denormalization techniques

A narrative strategy for keeping the industry’s role central, is doubling down on the **story of ‘resisting corporate power’**. Nowadays, a broad audience and even certain policy makers are susceptible to the story of an unfair economic system, advancing the few at the cost of the many, of which the tobacco industry is a staggering example. The statistics and numbers mentioned in earlier chapters can most definitely help here, as most people underestimate the scale of the industry (NEON et al, 2018).

The above strategy can be strengthened by the technique of **‘tobacco industry denormalization’**. A robust body of evidence suggests that denormalization is an effective tobacco control intervention at the population level (Malone et al, 2011). This technique denormalizes the industry and the way it operates. By exposing concrete manipulations, lies and deceptions of the industry, the denormalization frame is useful in stirring up emotions. There is also evidence for the effective performance of mass media campaigns carrying strong negative messages about the tobacco industry deception (NCI, 2008; IGTC, 2024).

**Governments and jurisdictions are crucial actors in this systemic battle.** Tobacco endgame narratives must draw more political attention to the issue. The above techniques offer a way in, because this issue is not merely a matter of individual behaviors or corporate greed, but of institutional failures to protect the public (Malone, 2024).

<b>DO</b>	<b>DON'T</b>
Focus on the industry as the culprit and emphasize systemic manipulation by leveraging denormalization or ‘resisting corporate power’ frames	Center narratives only on protecting specific groups or denormalizing smoking behavior
Frame tobacco control as addressing institutional failures to protect people	Present the issue as primarily about individual behaviors

## 8. Avoid ‘radical’, embrace ‘realistic’

The tobacco endgame is not a radical dream, but a realistic path forward. A full range of policies and strategies are already available, with evidence continuously expanding. This isn't speculative, it's strategic. There are two techniques to make tobacco endgame thinking more realistic in people's minds: using successful examples of regions already making great progress, or pointing to past examples of successful and comparable systemic change.

**First, have real, concrete and successful examples ready.** While regional approaches don't allow a copy and paste, our brains are wired to appreciate specific, winning stories. Consider below promising regional examples, more can be found on [projectsunset.ash.org](https://projectsunset.ash.org).

- In 2021, Brookline (Massachusetts, USA) passed a first-of-its-kind law, banning tobacco sales to anyone born on or after January 1, 2000. This policy prevents new generations from ever being sold tobacco, setting legal precedent despite pushback. Over 15 towns in Massachusetts have followed suit.
- In 2018, Singapore extended a ban to include the purchase, use, and possession of electronic vaporisers, effectively preventing their proliferation before they could gain any popularity.
- In 2024, The Netherlands banned tobacco sales in supermarkets, cutting off 6,400 retail points. By 2032, only specialty stores will sell tobacco products, demonstrating how a gradual phase-out can dismantle commercial tobacco access.

Secondly, advocating for unprecedented change such as the tobacco endgame is making people visualize a different future. This is often done more effectively when visualizing what the future could look like instead of focusing on what's wrong now. However, visualizing a future that doesn't exist yet (like tobacco endgame) is hard. The other side of the debate, keeping things the way they are or going back to old ways, is surely easier to visualize.

Asking people to visualize an unimaginable future can make ideas like tobacco endgame sound unrealistic. However, this type of big change isn't always as unprecedented as we might initially think. A great way to overcome this hurdle is to point to **past examples where society successfully underwent major systemic changes**. Use examples that people in your region will recognize. Concrete examples also give politicians precedent to point to when facing opposition. Early wins create political cover for broader action by demonstrating both feasibility and public acceptance.

Here are some general examples:

- **Asbestos:** Once used everywhere in buildings, now banned in most places after we learned how deadly it is.
- **Leaded gasoline:** Removed from our fuel despite significant industry resistance.
- **Trans fats:** These artificial fats were once common in processed foods, from cookies to french fries. After linking them to heart disease, many countries banned or severely restricted their use in food products.
- **CFCs:** These chemicals that were destroying the ozone layer were in everything from refrigerators to hairspray. These were banned worldwide.
- **Slavery:** Once legally and economically entrenched in many societies, it was abolished through sustained moral, political, and legal action — despite fierce resistance from powerful interests.
- **DDT and other harmful pesticides:** These were banned despite strong industry opposition.

<b>DO</b>	<b>DON'T</b>
Use words such as 'concrete', 'achievable'; 'logical', 'realistic', 'the next step'	Use words such as 'radical', 'brave', 'dream' or 'wish' to describe endgame
Use concrete examples of jurisdictions implementing endgame policies	Overstress the lack of long term evidence for endgame policies, as this is often a counter technique by the industry
Use concrete examples from the past	Present tobacco endgame as unprecedented without historical parallels

## 9. Always emphasize the already high public support

One of the most powerful yet underutilized tools in tobacco endgame advocacy is the existing public support for significant action against the tobacco industry. When politicians and policymakers hesitate to embrace endgame policies, they often cite concerns about public backlash. However, the evidence consistently shows that citizens are far ahead of their leaders on this issue—they want bold action to end the tobacco industry.

Research from multiple countries reveals substantial support for comprehensive tobacco endgame measures:

- Australia: 73% of adults support phasing out cigarette sales by 2030 (Brennan et al, 2023)
- United States: 76% of adults—including 62.9% of people who smoke—support mandating very low nicotine content (VLNC) in tobacco products” (Kim et al., 2024)
- Canada: 81% of respondents support a "tobacco endgame strategy" (Heart & Stroke Foundation, 2023)

This support transcends political divides, with majorities across the spectrum favoring strong action. When framed as corporate accountability rather than restricting individual choice, support increases further.

When communicating about tobacco endgame to policymakers, always lead with evidence of public support before discussing policy specifics. This addresses their primary concern (political feasibility) upfront and creates a more receptive environment for the detailed policy discussion that follows. And remember that politicians respond to vocal constituencies, not silent majorities. Try to couple polling data with guidance on how supporters can make their voices heard through constituent contact, town halls, and organized advocacy.

<b>DO</b>	<b>DON'T</b>
Always emphasize high public support and have recent polling data ready	Assume policymakers already know about public support, they might underestimate it based on industry lobbying or simply not have tobacco on their radar

## 10. Avoid polarization between those who smoke and those who don't

A critical component of successful tobacco endgame communication is maintaining unity between people who smoke and people who don't. The tobacco industry exploits potential divisions by portraying tobacco control as a conflict between "anti-smokers" and "smokers' rights". This framing serves industry interests by creating a false narrative of polarization.

**In reality, most people who smoke want to quit.** Surveys consistently show that around 60% of tobacco users report wanting to stop smoking (WHO, 2023). The addictive power of nicotine, not lack of willpower or desire, keeps many trapped in a cycle they wish to escape. Many people who smoke express feelings of resentment toward the companies that profit from their addiction.

Both people who smoke and those who don't share a common adversary: the tobacco industry. Frame endgame policies as protecting all citizens from an industry that profits from addiction. Emphasize how tobacco companies have manipulated their products to be more addictive, targeted vulnerable populations, and fought against policies that would help people quit. Emphasize how every single person carries a big burden due to the damage done by the tobacco industry, as all costs and risks are carried by society.

When discussing the harms of tobacco, always distinguish between the products, the tobacco industry, and the people who use tobacco. Focus criticism on corporate executives and shareholders who profit from harm. Ultimately, the most successful tobacco endgame narratives will be those that bring people together, offering support to those struggling with addiction while maintaining a clear focus on the true source of the problem: the tobacco industry itself.

DO	DON'T
Emphasize the fact that people who smoke did not actively choose this addiction: this is a shared fight, we all want to hold the tobacco industry accountable for harm they cause.	Blame or criminalize people who smoke. Use language that stigmatizes people who smoke or portrays them as lacking willpower, making bad choices, or being complicit with the industry.

# 11. Cessation support is imperative to the tobacco endgame

While most countries already have established cessation programs, these support systems must be comprehensive and/or fully funded as part of any tobacco endgame strategy. **Endgame policies must never remove access to addictive products without ensuring robust help for those currently dependent on them.** This is both ethically necessary and strategically essential.

As prevalence continues to decline, those who still smoke often face greater barriers to quitting, including higher levels of addiction, mental health challenges, and socioeconomic disadvantages. Research by Hoek et al. (2022) demonstrates that as smoking becomes less common, those who continue face increased stigmatization, which paradoxically may deepen their perceived smoking identity and make successful cessation even more difficult. This is precisely why endgame communications must avoid any language that could add to this stigmatization.

Cessation support serves several strategic functions in advancing the tobacco endgame:

1. It counters industry narratives about individual choice
2. It maintains coalition strength with healthcare providers and advocates
3. It addresses legitimate policy concerns from policymakers
4. It creates a successful feedback loop as more people quit

DO	DON'T
Talk about cessation as an essential complement to endgame and frame it as society's response to tobacco industry-created harm	Allow framing of endgame policies as abandoning or punishing people who smoke
Emphasize how both cessation and endgame work together to eliminate the tobacco industry	Position cessation support as optional or secondary to endgame

## 12. Position endgame as the final step, not a tobacco control replacement

A study of six countries pioneering tobacco endgame strategies (Nip et al., 2024) reveals endgame approaches work best in contexts with strong tobacco control infrastructures and low smoking prevalence. This suggests effective endgame narratives must be clear: this is not about discarding existing measures like MPOWER, but taking the next logical step. The key communication challenge is positioning endgame as a natural progression rather than replacement.

Despite the comprehensive MPOWER framework, challenges remain in reducing tobacco use to near-zero levels. Even in jurisdictions with high implementation scores, smoking prevalence currently remains above the 5% endgame threshold. While these measures create essential foundations, they may not be sufficient to achieve endgame goals alone due to:

1. **Implementation and enforcement challenges** plague critical areas such as smoke-free environment regulations, advertising bans, and taxation policies.
2. **Industry adaptation and interference** allows for tobacco companies to consistently find ways to circumvent restrictions, whether through product design, marketing, sponsorships, or promotions.
3. **Products** like e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products create new challenges that traditional control measures weren't designed to address.

This relationship between conventional tobacco control and endgame policies needs more research, but from a communications perspective: always acknowledge the crucial foundation that the FCTC, MPOWER and similar frameworks have provided. Position endgame strategies as building upon these foundations—the logical next step that becomes possible after conventional tobacco control has reduced prevalence.

The most effective narratives position the tobacco endgame as the culmination of decades of tobacco control progress, a sophisticated approach that **builds on existing efforts while addressing their limitations to achieve the ultimate goal of permanently ending the tobacco industry.**

DO	DON'T
Frame endgame strategies as the natural next step that's both possible and necessary after conventional tobacco control has reduced prevalence to a certain level.	Position endgame as a replacement for or criticism of existing tobacco control measures that have produced significant public health gains.

### 13. Consider using the ‘leapfrog’ frame to increase attraction

While the above recommendation emphasizes endgame as a natural next step, an emerging complementary frame offers an alternative narrative: **the concept of ‘leapfrogging’**. This suggests some jurisdictions might accelerate progress by adopting certain endgame policies directly, potentially bypassing some intermediate steps in traditional tobacco control.

Leapfrogging describes how countries can skip developmental stages by adopting advanced solutions directly, as was illustrated by many African countries skipping telephone landlines in favor of mobile phones (Ritchie, 2024). In tobacco control, this suggests some jurisdictions might rapidly advance by implementing certain endgame strategies rather than following a step-by-step incremental approach.

While promising from a communications standpoint, the leapfrogging approach requires further research. We need more evidence on which endgame policies might work without the full foundation of traditional measures, and in which contexts.

Successful leapfrogging depends on tailored strategies aligned with local social, cultural, and political landscapes. Use this framing selectively with audiences who might find it appealing, particularly policymakers seeking innovative approaches to seemingly intractable problems. For example, Sub-Saharan Africa might be a potential target for the leapfrogging narrative as the smoking prevalence is currently low but on the rise.

DO	DON'T
Present leapfrogging as an exciting approach for specific contexts	Position it as a proven strategy without sufficient evidence (it is not - yet)
Use the leapfrogging frame to spark new interest where it has stalled for traditional approaches and/or a way to save time (vs incremental policies year after year)	Suggest it can replace foundational tobacco control work

## 14. Leverage different types of voices to put endgame higher up the agenda

Many tobacco control organizations have proven to be excellent collaborative partners for governments worldwide. As they've been invaluable in policy development and research, a strategic question arises: how can the movement position tobacco endgame as mainstream rather than radical? This final recommendation explores how different voices using varying degrees of boldness can push social norms forward.

Research on social movements demonstrates the "radical flank effect" - more radical factions can increase support for moderate groups and their goals (Simpson et al, 2022). This creates a strategic opportunity: when some voices call for bolder action, other organization's proposals suddenly appear more moderate and reasonable by comparison.

The endgame movement will benefit from having a diverse ecosystem of actors using different approaches and levels of boldness. Some organizations may have direct relationships with policymakers that require measured approaches, while others can afford to be more confrontational. This isn't about "established vs. grassroots" - it's about strategic role differentiation within the movement.

When some advocates call for immediate and complete abolition of the tobacco industry, proposals for phased elimination over a decade appear moderate and reasonable by comparison. This strategic positioning helps normalize endgame thinking across the political spectrum.

Tobacco endgame advocacy can also include natural allies from other public interest sectors. Environmental groups have proven particularly effective advocates, leading successful campaigns like the Manhattan Beach sales ban (led by Surfriders) and the Santa Cruz County cigarette filter ban (ASH, 2024). Consumer protection organizations, human rights groups, anti-poverty advocates, and healthcare access organizations all have compelling reasons to support tobacco industry elimination.

<b>DO</b>	<b>DON'T</b>
Allow different actors to play complementary roles and welcome tactical approaches within the movement	Dismiss radical voices as counterproductive or expect all organizations to use the same approach

# Key 'tobacco endgame' statements

"A snake that sheds its skin is still a snake. New products, same deadly industry."

"We must move from controlling tobacco to abolishing the industry that profits from addiction and causes disease and death."

"Just as we eliminated leaded gasoline and asbestos, we can and must eliminate the tobacco industry."

"Tobacco endgame is the only option to fully free ourselves from an industry that has repeatedly proven unworthy of our trust and health."

"This isn't about who smokes and who doesn't. We're all victims of an aggressive industry that deliberately engineered addiction."

"Bold political leadership creates space for public demand. Strong public demand creates space for political leadership."

"Health creation for all, not wealth creation for a few."

"The public demands tobacco industry elimination—politicians need to catch up."

"They profit from people until the end, until people make it end."

"Tobacco industry elimination, not accommodation."

"The tobacco endgame isn't radical—it's realistic."

"At what age do you want your children or grandchildren to start smoking? If never, let's end the tobacco industry so they aren't at risk."

"The endgame is about ending supply, not just reducing demand. We need production cessation, not just consumption cessation."

# 5. Endnote

## **They'll profit from people until the end, until people make it end.**

Looking back thirty years, we believed that having smokefree workplaces or not smoking on a plane were totally ludicrous ideas. By now, this has become the social norm and standard. It's time to push this forward. The cigarette century is over. The nicotine and tobacco industry has to be done.

Anyone reading this report can help spread this new social norm by making it a topic of conversation. Whether you're a policy advisor, professional in the health sector or just a curious reader, you too can play a massive role in advancing this concept. Above all, this report is meant to spark a conversation around tobacco endgame, for the concept to become more normalized.

To sum up, the tobacco industry has shown remarkable resilience and adaptability over decades. Current tobacco control measures will never be enough. By normalizing the concept of tobacco industry elimination through consistent, compelling messaging, we can build the public and political will necessary for bold action. The tobacco endgame isn't just possible, it's already beginning in jurisdictions worldwide. Join the conversation, share these messages, help make the end of the tobacco industry inevitable and stand on the right side of history.

**Thank you for reading this report.  
If you have any questions or would like to  
discuss findings further, please reach out.**

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