

PRESS RELEASE

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Finnish physician Maria Juusela urges EU to protect young people from new nicotine products

At a European Respiratory Society event in Brussels, Juusela presented the respiratory evidence on e-cigarettes, heated tobacco products and nicotine pouches, and the situation in Finland, as the EU prepares to revise its tobacco laws.

Brussels, 20 October 2026 – Maria Juusela, Chair of Doctors Against Tobacco and Nicotine (DAT) in Finland and a member of the Tobacco Control Committee of the European Respiratory Society (ERS), today addressed EU policymakers, health officials and clinicians at the ERS event “Curbing the nicotine epidemic – the case for child protection in the new EU Directives”.

Speaking on a panel on the public health perspectives on emerging nicotine products, Juusela set out what is known about the effects of e-cigarettes, heated tobacco products and nicotine pouches on a person’s health, why ERS considers all of these products harmful and addictive and does not accept the industry’s claims that they reduce harm, and what doctors are seeing in young patients.

“Harm reduction is a strategy that the tobacco industry introduced to keep smokers dependent on nicotine,” said Juusela. “First came e-cigarettes and vaping, and now that smokeless products are in demand, nicotine pouches have been launched. All of this serves only to increase the profits of the tobacco and nicotine industry, at the cost of human health.”

In Finland, Juusela warned, nicotine pouches are now the main concern. “The number of nicotine pouch users has increased five-fold in the past couple of years,” she said. “We see young women and men, and even children, quickly becoming dependent on these new, strong products, without knowing about the harm nicotine does to their health. Finland had brought daily smoking in the general population down to 10%. But now we are struggling with a growing number of nicotine pouch users, and our goal of a smoke- and nicotine-free Finland by 2030 is moving further away.”

Finland is one of seven EU countries that have written a goal of ending tobacco use into national law, alongside Belgium, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Sweden. And on 6 October 2026, Finland and seven other Member States – Belgium, France, Hungary, Latvia, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Spain – wrote jointly to EU Health Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi, calling for the revision of the EU laws to move from a reactive to a preventive approach.¹ They asked for a freeze on new nicotine products and devices entering the EU market, strict maximum nicotine levels, a broad flavour ban and plain packaging for all products, and for Member States to be allowed to ban nicotine pouches nationally.¹

Juusela called for the revised EU rules to close the door on the next generation of products. “The law should cover not only nicotine but also substances that act in a similar way, including synthetic nicotine analogues,” she said. “This would prevent regulatory loopholes and keep the legislation applicable to new synthetic products with nicotine-like effects as they reach the consumer market.”

“Finland has made some progress with its recently updated Tobacco Act: The plain packaging is in force for nicotine pouches similar to cigarette packs. However, somewhat controversial is that the two

flavours (mint and menthol that are forbidden in cigarettes) are allowed.,” Juusela added. “But the toxicity of nicotine and its short- and long-term health effects are still something many people, even doctors, are not aware of.”

The ERS Tobacco Control Committee has found that e-cigarettes, heated tobacco products and nicotine pouches remain harmful and addictive, and their uptake among young people is a major concern.² Nicotine pouches are currently not covered by EU tobacco product rules, so no EU packaging rules or health warnings apply to them in countries without local laws (like Finland).²

The European Commission is preparing a revision of the EU Tobacco Products Directive and Tobacco Advertising Directive by the end of the year. The Brussels event brought together policymakers, public health experts, clinicians and patient representatives to discuss how the new rules can respond to new products, close existing gaps and protect future generations.

Juusela spoke alongside Paul Dendale (European Society of Cardiology), Anette Jansson (European Heart Network) and Alba Gil (Association of European Cancer Leagues), in a panel convened with the European Chronic Disease Alliance and chaired by Des Cox, Chair of the ERS Tobacco Control Committee, and Stamatoula Tsikrika. The event was opened by a video address from Jennifer Murnane O’Connor, Minister of State at the Department of Health of Ireland, and is an Associated Event of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2026.

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Notes for editors

About the European Respiratory Society (ERS). ERS is the largest scientific and clinical organisation in respiratory medicine in Europe, with more than 35,000 members from over 160 countries. Its mission is to promote lung health and alleviate suffering from respiratory disease. ersnet.org

References.

¹Joint letter of the Ministers of Health of Belgium, Finland, France, Hungary, Latvia, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Spain to Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi on the revision of the Tobacco Products Directive and Tobacco Advertising Directive, 6 October 2026. Published by the Government of the Netherlands (<https://open.overheid.nl/overheid/openbaarmakingen/api/v0/attachment/5bc71a8f-7dc4-429b-95e6-1f5fd06e96d2>)

²Chen DT-H, Grigg J, Filippidis FT, on behalf of the ERS Tobacco Control Committee. ERS statement on novel nicotine and tobacco products, their role in tobacco control and “harm reduction”. *Eur Respir J* 2024; 63: 2301808. doi:10.1183/13993003.01808-2023