

WHO's Policy Shift Against Tobacco Harm Reduction

Prelims: Current Events of National and International Importance

Why in News?

WHO's recent shift opposes tobacco harm reduction, deviating from earlier endorsements of safer alternatives, not only contradicts decades of evidence but 'disproportionately harms countries like India.

- **Earlier framework** - The World Health Organization (WHO) had previously balanced prevention, cessation, and harm reduction, recognizing benefits from alternatives like e-cigarettes.
- **Present WHO recommendation** - The WHO now strongly prioritizes a "cessation-only" approach, urging that people quit all forms of tobacco and nicotine use rather than transition to safer alternatives.
- **CAPHRA Objection** - The Coalition of Asia Pacific Tobacco Harm Reduction Advocates (CAPHRA) flags the significant risks, especially in the Indian context.

CHAPRA

- It is an alliance between the Tobacco Harm Reduction Advocates and their respective organizations in the Asia Pacific Region.
- **Aim** - To educate, advocate and represent the right of adult alternative nicotine consumers to access and use of products that reduce harm from tobacco use.

- CHAPRA recently released a "white paper" noting that Nicotine is not what causes cancer or heart disease. It's the **toxic smoke from burning tobacco that kills.**
- **Disproportionate impact** - CAPHRA argues that a prohibitionist approach will disproportionately harm countries like India, with high smoking rates and diverse tobacco use.
- **E-cigarettes and other ENDS** - WHO's stance on electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) is a major point of contention.
- While some studies suggest they are less harmful than smoking, WHO remains cautious and concerned about their potential risks.
- **Gateway effect** - The concern that e-cigarettes may lead to smoking remains a significant factor in the WHO's approach.
- **Industry influence** - Some critics suggest that the tobacco industry has exploited the concept of harm reduction to promote its products.

Concerns

- **Usage diversity** - Over 200 million use smokeless tobacco, and millions smoke bidis; informal networks dominate the market.
- **Economic lifeline** - The tobacco sector maintains around 45 million jobs, many belonging to farmers, small businesses, and rural women.
- **Vulnerable Groups** - The policy shift risks harming the most economically and socially vulnerable populations.

Reference

[The Hindu| WHO's Policy Shift Against Tobacco Harm Reduction](#)

