POWER
IN A POUCH
THE ROAD TO
A HEALTHIER
SMOKE-FREE
FUTURE
MEXICO

INTRODUCTION

Major new evidence shows that oral nicotine pouches could play a decisive role in helping Mexico's smokers move away from cigarettes, at a moment when policymakers are weighing tighter restrictions on these potentially life-saving products.

Despite decades of tobacco control efforts, smoking remains a major public health burden in Mexico, and pouches – currently unregulated but already subject to heavy taxation – offer a practical, lower-risk alternative for adults who smoke.

Their appeal extends well beyond harm reduction: users consistently value pouches for being more considerate to others, more environmentally friendly and easier to use discreetly than combustible or vapour-based alternatives, making them a realistic substitute rather than a niche product.

New consumer data analysed in this report, drawn from a nationwide poll of 1,024 adult cigarette and nicotine product users, provides real-world insight into how people in Mexico view, use and benefit from oral nicotine pouches. Key findings include:

- **More than three out of four (77%) pouch users report smoking fewer cigarettes, with 6% quitting cigarettes altogether and average daily consumption roughly halving.**
- **Only 28% of all respondents consider pouches very or extremely harmful, well below cigarettes (59%), vaping (52%) and heated tobacco (44%).**
- **71% of people support regulated access to pouches, while opposition to an outright ban (47%) runs almost twice as high as support for one (24%).**
- **41% of those not using pouches have never even heard of the product, making low awareness – not product performance – the biggest barrier to adoption.**

Crucially, restriction would not eliminate demand: more than one in three (35%) of all respondents believe a ban would fuel illicit trade, while almost half (47%) believe it would push people back toward cigarettes rather than away from nicotine altogether.

Countries such as Sweden have dramatically reduced smoking and related diseases by making nicotine pouches accessible, acceptable and affordable to adults.

This report warns that restricting nicotine pouches could drive consumers back to smoking or toward illicit products, undermining Mexico's public health objectives.

MEXICO'S SMOKING CRISIS

Mexico has made only modest progress in reducing tobacco use over the past decade and almost one in five Mexicans is still smoking. Adult smoking prevalence was 17.3% in 2025[1] – 26.2% among men, 9.2% among women – barely lower than where it stood in 2011.[2]

This exacts a terrible toll. Smoking kills more than 63,000 Mexicans a year, about 173 people a day.[3] It costs the country nearly 195 billion pesos annually: 116 billion in direct healthcare spending, another 79 billion in lost productivity. That's 0.4% of GDP and 7.6% of national health spending.[4]

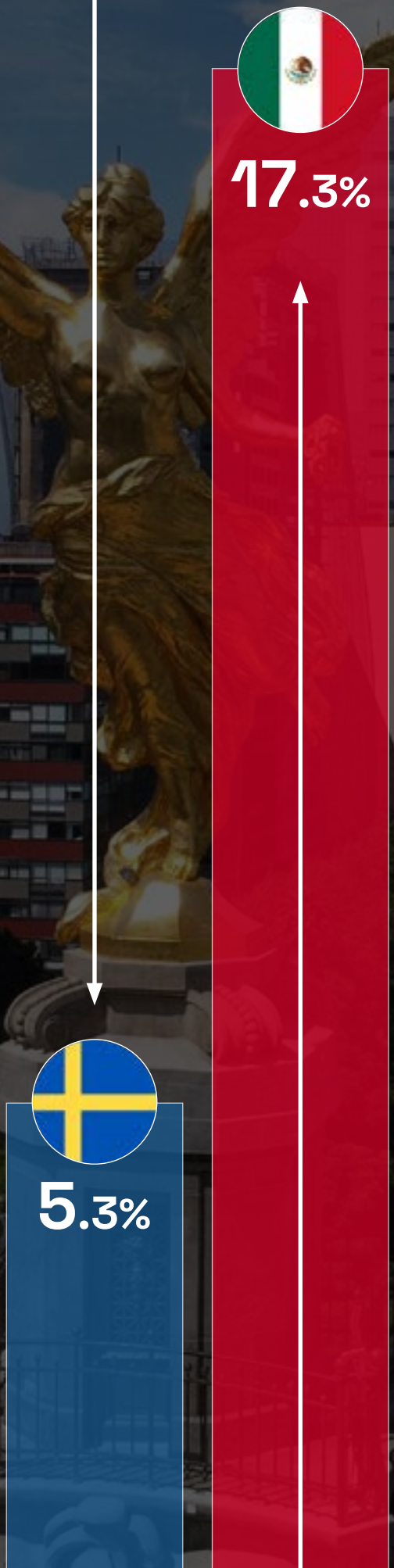
In addition to its persistent smoking burden, Mexico faces a significant gap between smokers' desire to quit and access to effective support. ENCODAT 2025 shows high motivation and frequent quit attempts but limited use of counselling and medication, highlighting the need for stronger cessation services and harm-reduction options.[5]

Meanwhile, Mexico is closing off the safer alternatives that might offer smokers an escape route.

Vapes are constitutionally banned, and regulators and public health groups routinely dismiss nicotine pouches as addictive and dangerous to young people, overlooking their harm-reduction potential.[6,7]

Pouches still lack a dedicated regulatory framework, yet they are already taxed heavily, with further increases planned through 2030.[8,9] Smokers looking for a way off cigarettes are finding increasingly fewer options – even as smoking keeps killing thousands.

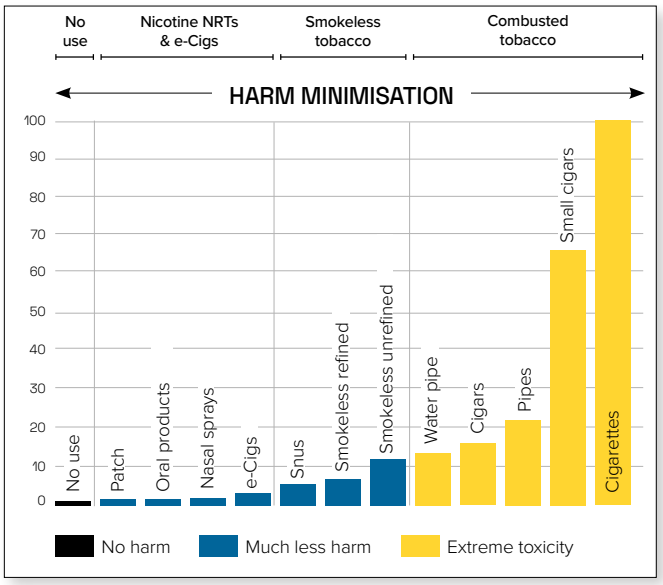
VAPES BANNED IN MEXICO



NICOTINE POUCHES: A PROVEN SAFER ALTERNATIVE

Nicotine pouches are smoke-free and tobacco-free products placed under the lip, delivering pharmaceutical-grade nicotine without combustion. Nicotine is addictive and is not risk-free. However, by eliminating smoke, tar and carbon monoxide, they remove the primary drivers of smoking-related disease.[10,11]

A visualisation of the relative harm of all nicotine products can be found in this table (right), from the Oral Nicotine Commission 2020 Report.[12] Nicotine pouches present risks comparable to established nicotine replacement therapies such as gum and lozenges, which are on the World Health Organization's list of essential medicines.[13]



At the same time, pouches replicate key behavioural elements of smoking - routine and nicotine delivery - that many people who smoke struggle to replace with conventional cessation aids. This combination of low toxicological risk and high behavioural acceptability underpins their public health impact.

The efficacy of nicotine pouches has helped accelerate Sweden's progress towards smoke-free status, defined as a smoking prevalence below 5%.

Survey data in Smoke Free Sweden's first Power in a Pouch report[14] shows both male and female respondents ranked nicotine pouches highest among the alternatives they perceived as useful for quitting smoking.

WHY NICOTINE POUCHES MATTER FOR WOMEN

Sweden's experience illustrates the potential role of nicotine pouches as an additional smoke-free nicotine option for women.

Historically, Swedish women have had lower quit rates and fewer appealing alternatives to smoking. Before the introduction of pouches, the country's impressive reduction in smoking rates was driven largely by snus, a product that primarily appealed to men. The arrival of nicotine pouches in 2016 reshaped this dynamic.[15]

Since then:

- **Female smoking prevalence in Sweden has fallen by 49%.**
- **Women's quit-smoking rates have increased by 200%.**
- **The gender gap in smoking cessation has narrowed substantially.**

In a nationwide survey[16] for the Power in a Pouch report, women ranked pouches almost three times higher than vapes as their preferred quit-smoking aid and 56% higher than nicotine gum. They cited cleanliness, ease of use and the absence of smoke or smell as decisive advantages.

Meanwhile, 60% of female and 55% of male pouch users identified the variety of flavours as either their top or second most important reason for choosing nicotine pouches over tobacco snus.

These characteristics directly address barriers that often undermine quitting attempts among women, including social stigma, workplace constraints and caregiving responsibilities.

This evidence is particularly relevant to Mexico, where women smokers report less success than men in quitting, partly due to a lack of suitable alternatives.[17]

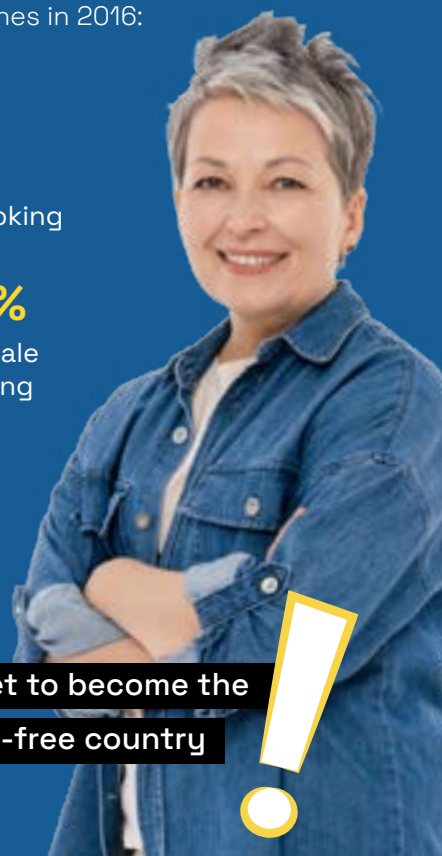
Sweden's transformation

With the **EU's lowest smoking rate (5.3%)**, Sweden is set to become the first country in the world to achieve official 'smoke-free' status, thanks to its embrace of safer alternatives like snus, vapes and nicotine pouches. Since the introduction of pouches in 2016:

49%
Decline in female smoking

200%
Rise in female quit-smoking rate

6x faster
reduction in female smoking than the rest of Europe



Sweden is on target to become the world's first smoke-free country

SWEDISH CASE STUDY IN SMOKE-FREE SUCCESS

Sweden has cut its smoking rate by more than half since 2012 to less than one-quarter of the European average[18] and now records some of the lowest rates of tobacco-related disease on the continent.[19] Key outcomes associated with Sweden's embrace of safer nicotine alternatives include:

- **Male lung cancer mortality 61% lower than the EU average.**
- **Overall cancer mortality 34% lower than the EU average.**
- **Rapid and sustained declines in smoking prevalence across demographics.**

The Swedish Council for Information on Alcohol and Other Drugs (CAN) recorded daily smoking at just 3.7% in 2025[20], indicating that the country has already passed the official threshold for smoke-free status. The Public Health Agency, whose data underpin much of this report's analysis of Sweden, is due to publish its statistics for this period in December 2026.

NICOTINE POUCHES IN THE FIRING LINE

Mexico has taken one of the toughest stances in Latin America on safer nicotine products. Since 2020, the government has banned the import, sale and marketing of vapes and e-cigarettes, citing health risks, especially for young people.[21]

Nicotine pouches are now in the firing line. They still lack their own regulatory category, but they are already taxed heavily.

Since January 2026, pouches have been subject to a 100% excise tax based on their value, as well as a fixed charge on every pouch based on nicotine content. That charge is due to rise each year until 2030.

Health campaigners are also demanding a complete ban on flavours and additives across all tobacco and nicotine products. They argue that flavoured products are more attractive to teenagers.

Government bodies and major public health groups keep describing pouches as addictive products that put young people at risk and benefit the tobacco industry. Their messaging largely dismisses the idea that pouches could help adult smokers switch to something less harmful.

Latest research shows that 2.6% of Mexicans use illicit vapes, while nicotine pouch use is reported by 0.1% of the population.[22] Despite this limited uptake, about three-quarters of smokers say they want to quit, yet quit rates have barely moved in more than a decade. Cutting off access to lower-risk options could stall that progress even further.

The vaping ban offers a preview of what might happen. The Federal Commission for the Protection against Sanitary Risks (COFEPRIS) keeps raiding and seizing products, but a thriving black market has taken hold online and through informal sellers.[23]

If pouches face the same restrictions, Mexico risks the same outcome: less oversight, weaker consumer protections and fewer paths for smokers trying to quit.

EVIDENCE FROM MEXICAN CONSUMERS

A poll of 1,024 Mexican consumers of cigarettes and nicotine products, conducted by Prodege from 15–27 July 2026, provides critical insight into awareness, usage patterns, and perceptions of nicotine pouches.

It shows that oral nicotine pouches:

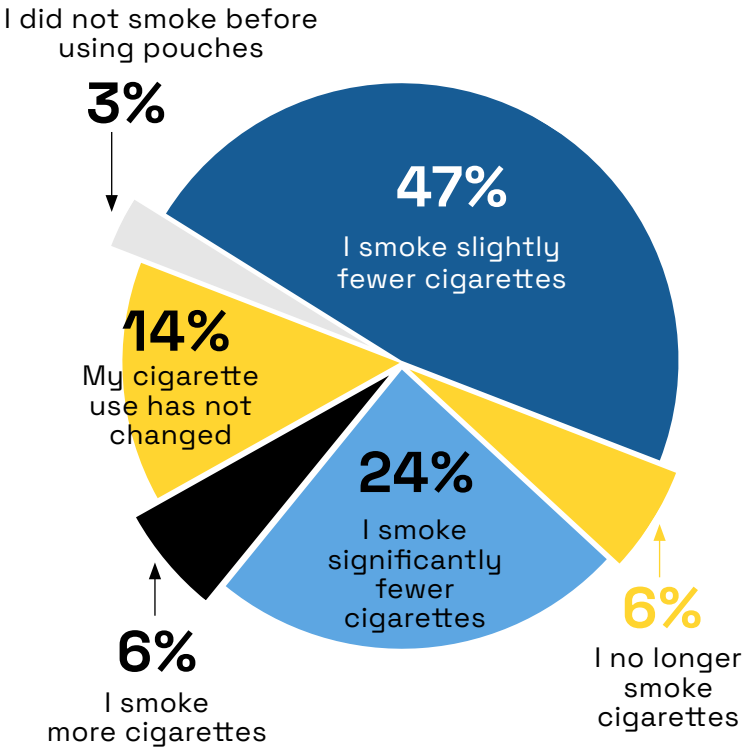
- **Deliver measurable reductions in cigarette consumption.**
- **Are used by consumers to avoid the harms caused by cigarettes.**
- **Offer unique social advantages (no smoke, no smell, no disruption).**
- **Face barriers driven primarily by lack of awareness - not lack of effectiveness.**
- **Are likely to become the driver of an illicit market as a result of their prohibition.**

QUITTING SUCCESS

Among Mexican pouch users, 77% report smoking fewer cigarettes, with 6% having stopped smoking altogether. The Prodege survey also revealed that after adopting pouches smokers' average consumption drops from 10 to five cigarettes per day. These findings represent a substantial self-reported shift in smoking behaviour and are consistent with the potential for harm reduction among adults who switch from cigarettes to nicotine pouches.

Q: Since using oral nicotine pouches, how has your cigarette consumption changed?

Pouch users' answer:

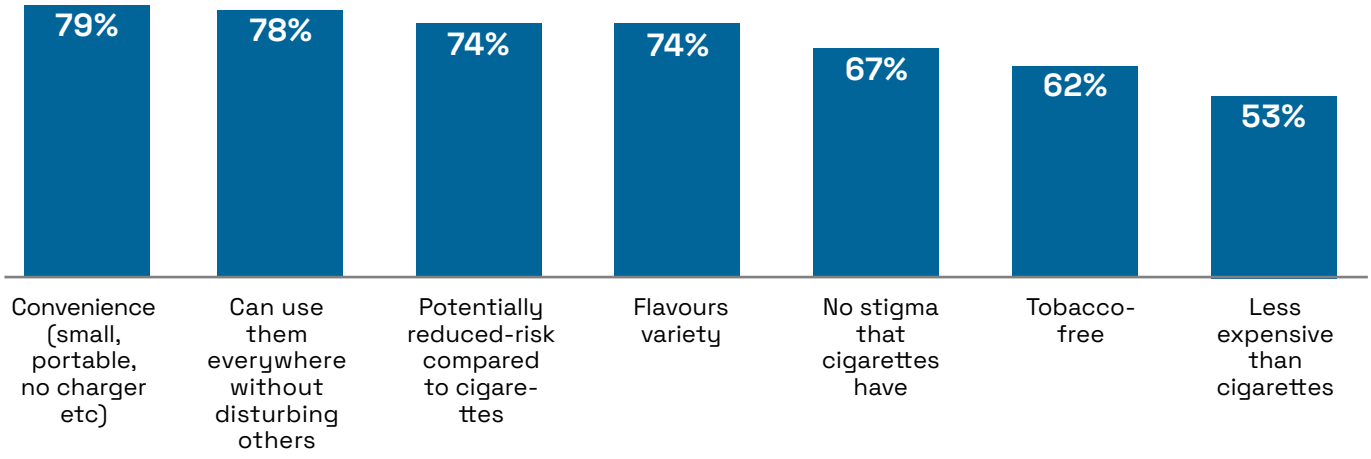


SAFER AND MORE CONSIDERATE

Health, consideration, convenience and flavour variety drive interest in oral nicotine pouches. For pouch users, the key motivators are their compact design, the ability to enjoy them without disturbing others and their reduced risk compared to cigarettes.

Three in four (74%) pouch users rate flavours as extremely important or very important. Compared to the users of other nicotine products, pouch users are more influenced by environmental impact and impact on people around them.

Q: How important was each of these features in your decision to use oral nicotine pouches? (graph shows pouch users who selected extremely important / very important on a 5pt scale)

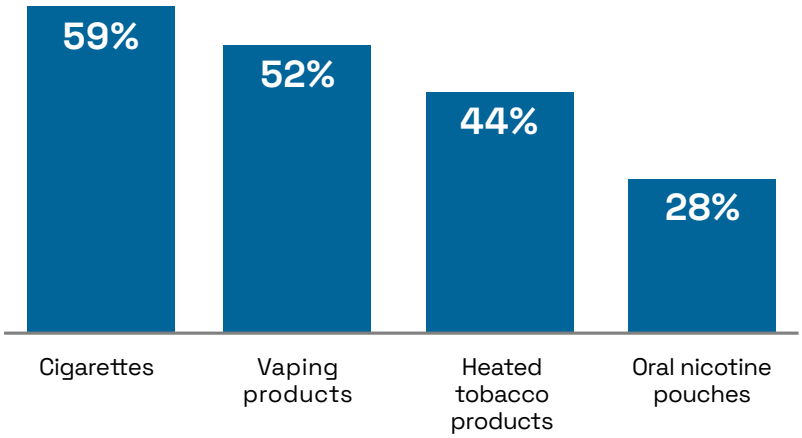


LEAST RISK

Pouches are perceived as the lowest-risk nicotine product. Only 28% of respondents consider them very or extremely harmful, compared with 59% for cigarettes, 52% for vaping products and 44% for heated tobacco products.

Overall, 38% rate pouches as mildly harmful or not harmful at all, rising to 52% among current pouch users.

Q: How harmful do you believe the following products are to the user's health? (graph shows respondents who selected extremely harmful / very harmful on a 5pt scale)

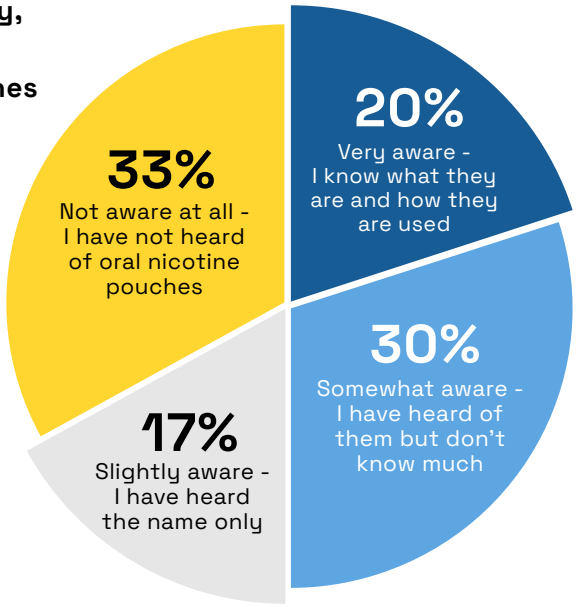


UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

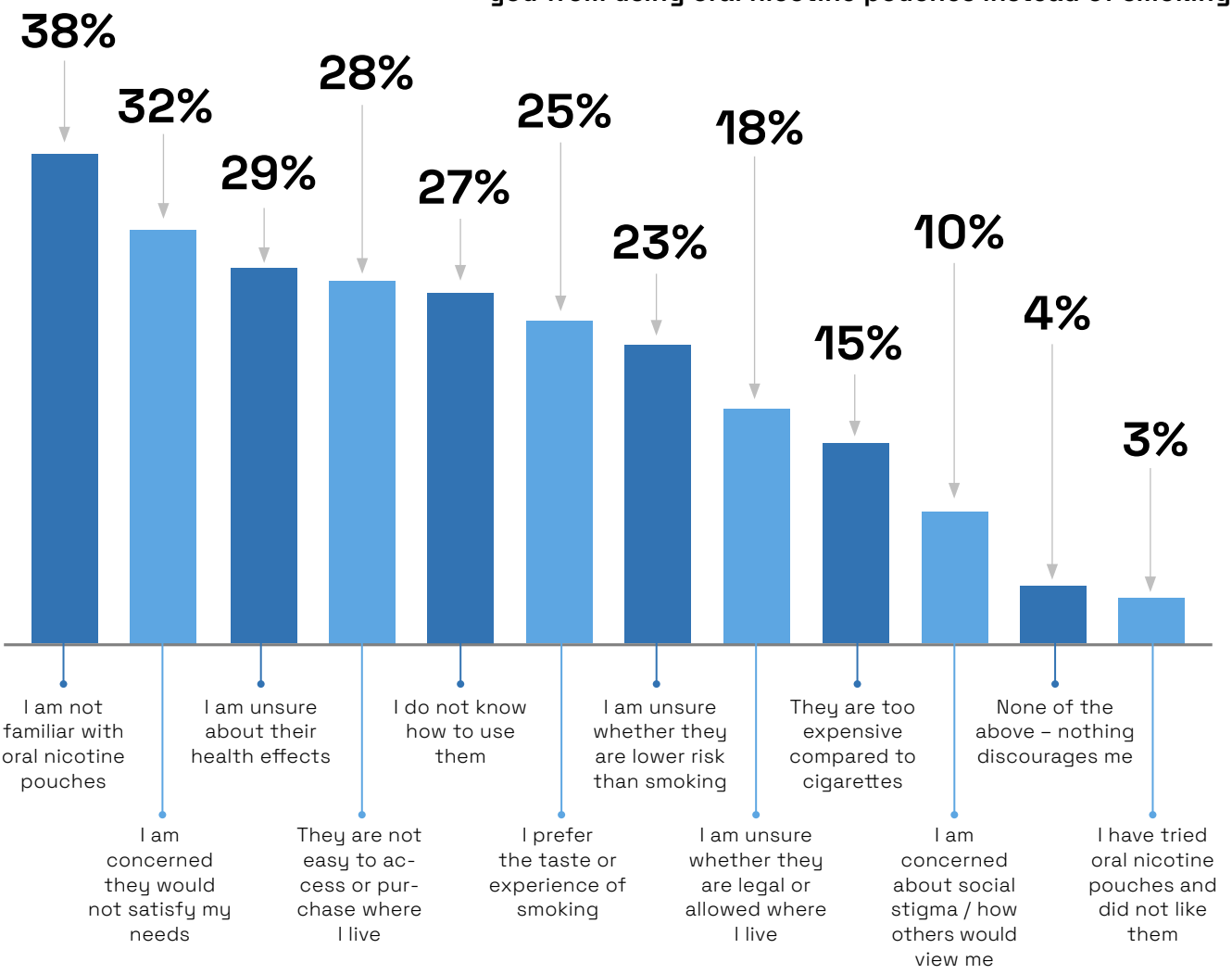
A third of respondents had never even heard of pouches, and only one in five describe themselves as "very aware" of the product. The harm-reduction potential of these products is being left almost entirely untapped.

When asked what factors discouraged them from using pouches, 38% cite lack of familiarity as the main barrier. Misunderstanding of health risks and a preference for smoking experience were other barriers, while 28% find them difficult to buy.

Q: Before today, how aware of nicotine pouches were you?



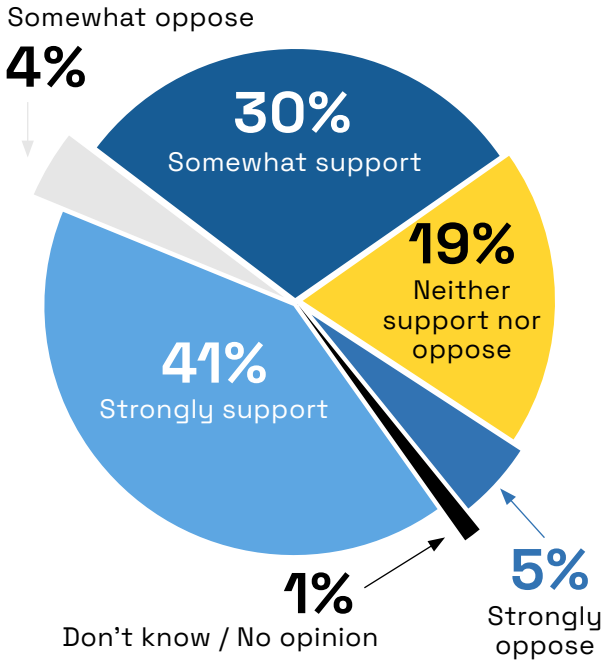
Q: Which, if any, of the following currently discourage you from using oral nicotine pouches instead of smoking



REGULATION, NOT PROHIBITION

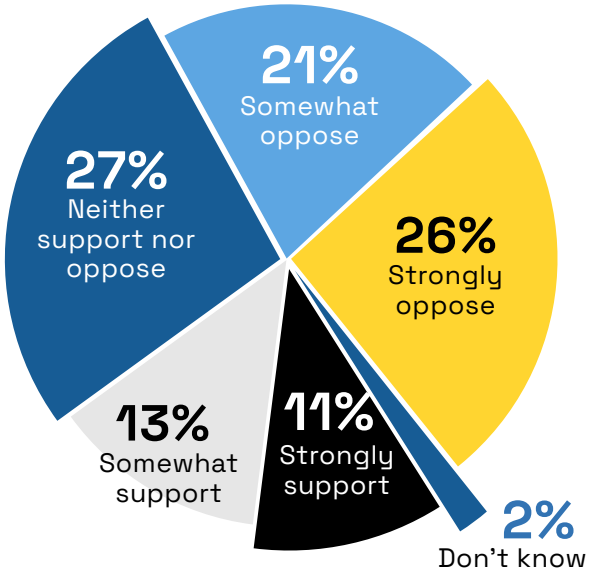
More than seven out of 10 believe nicotine pouches should be permitted for sale in Mexico subject to age restrictions, product standards and labelling requirements, with 41% expressing strong support. Less than one in 10 oppose regulated access.

Q: Do you support/oppose regulated **access to nicotine pouches?**



Q. Do you support banning pouches in Mexico?

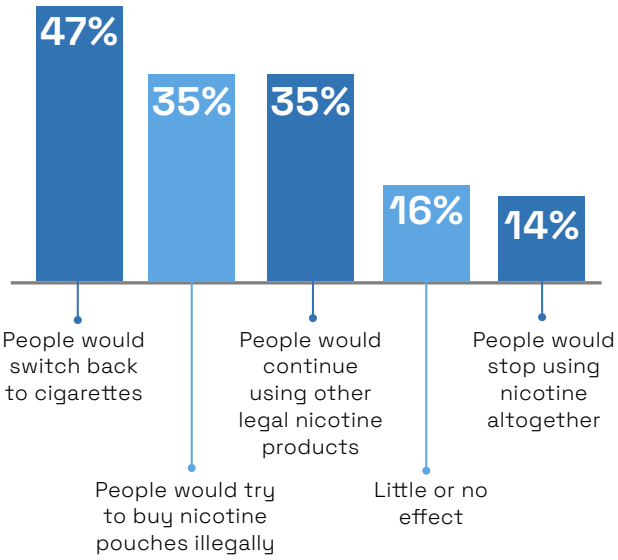
Opposition to the prohibition of nicotine pouches is almost twice as high as any support, with almost half of respondents declaring themselves against any ban.



BEWARE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Almost half of respondents believe that banning pouches would push people back to cigarettes, while more than one in three say it would fuel an illicit market.

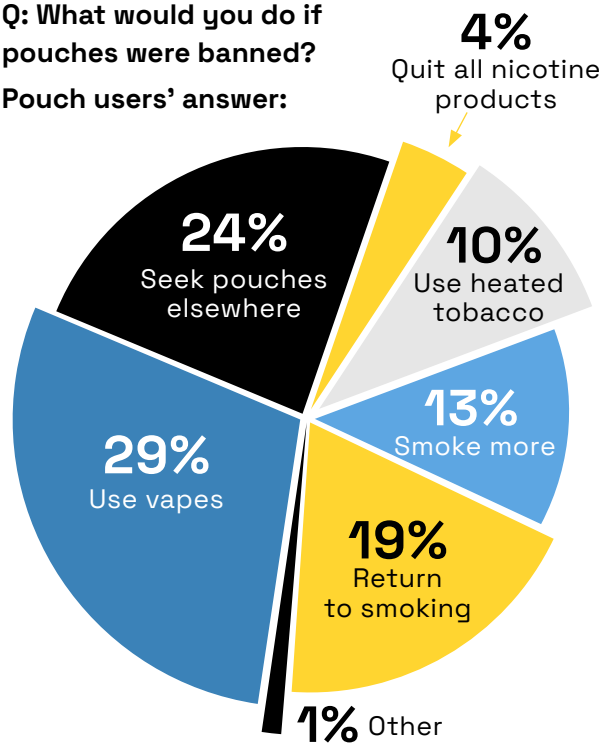
Q: How would a pouch ban affect nicotine use?



Only 4% of pouch users would stop using nicotine if pouches were no longer legally available. 19% would return to smoking and 13% would smoke more, a combined 32% who would consume more cigarettes.

Q: What would you do if pouches were banned?

Pouch users' answer:



CONCLUSION

Mexico's experience exposes a widening gap between traditional tobacco control policy and the realities of nicotine use.

While smoking rates remain persistently high, many people are already turning to smoke-free alternatives that better align with their lifestyles and quitting goals.

This report shows how nicotine pouches are helping to reduce smoking, with users reporting lower cigarette consumption, complete quitting and reduced daily nicotine use.

Consumers view pouches as cleaner, more socially considerate and less harmful than smoking, while valuing practical advantages such as convenience and discretion.

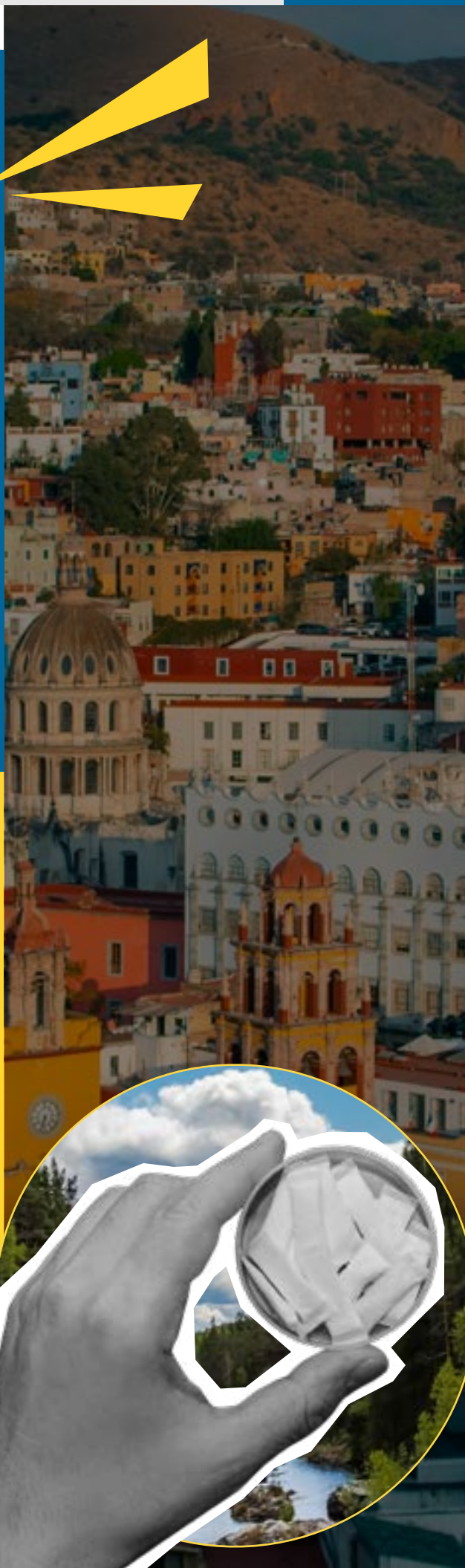
Evidence from Sweden demonstrates the potential of harm reduction when safer alternatives are accessible, acceptable and affordable.

Mexico risks missing out on this opportunity by restricting products that may help people move away from combustible tobacco, while potentially fuelling illicit trade and pushing smokers back toward cigarettes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To better reduce smoking-related disease and death in Mexico, policymakers should adopt a risk-proportionate approach focused on helping people transition away from combustible cigarettes. Key actions should include:

- **A regulatory framework for oral nicotine pouches based on relative risk.**
- **Permitted adult access to nicotine pouches as a lower-risk alternative to smoking, subject to age restrictions, product standards and labelling requirements.**
- **Availability of a wide variety of flavours to support adults switching from cigarettes to safer alternatives.**
- **Enhanced cessation services, including professional counselling and pharmacological treatment.**
- **Stronger enforcement against illicit and non-compliant nicotine products.**
- **Improved public education on the relative risks of smoke-free alternatives to address low awareness and misinformation.**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Delon Human

South Africa, France

Dr Human is a specialist family physician and global health advocate. He is the former Secretary-General of the World Medical Association, International Food and Beverage Alliance and Co-founder of the African Harm Reduction Alliance (AHRA). He has acted as an adviser to three WHO Directors-General and to the UN Secretary-General on global public health strategies.

Dr Alan Kleiman Zisman

Mexico

Dr Kleiman is a Mexican physician and General Surgeon specialising in gastrointestinal and minimally invasive surgery. He trained at Universidad Anáhuac and UNAM and practises at Hospital Ángeles Lomas. His tobacco harm reduction work focuses on evidence-based assessment of nicotine products, relative-risk communication and proportionate regulation, including the role of lower-risk alternatives in tobacco-control strategies in Mexico and internationally.

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