



TOBACCO HARM REDUCTION SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME

The First Three Years 2018–2021



A tribute to our friend and colleague Kevin Molloy (1957–2021)

From 2018 until early 2021, Kevin Molloy worked with Knowledge•Action•Change as Head of the Tobacco Harm Reduction Scholarship Programme (THRSP). In July 2021, Scholars, Mentors, colleagues and friends were devastated when Kevin died from lung cancer, at the age of 63.

Born in Birmingham, UK, Kevin studied English and Drama at university, but experienced some struggles in his teens and twenties. Having successfully overcome substance use difficulties by his early thirties, Kevin took up acting classes, leading to roles in top TV dramas, indie rock videos and at least one Hollywood blockbuster. It was while honing his acting skills that he met Anne, a performing arts lecturer, who would later become his wife.

In the early 1990s, Kevin began work in the drug field. Thanks to his many talents and his caring and generous nature, his career in harm reduction and drug treatment flourished. While he and Anne were

both working and raising their children, Lottie and Jake, he studied for an MBA, progressing to ever more senior professional roles.

Kevin's knowledge, experience and wisdom made him the perfect candidate to head the THRSP, inspiring the next generation of harm reductionists in a field which has the potential to change so many millions of lives for the better. He supported Scholars from around the world to develop their ideas into projects with measurable impacts, building the evidence-base, increasing awareness, and ensuring no-one is left behind. Turn to page 33 to learn how we will be honouring Kevin's memory as the THRSP moves into its next phase.

Reflections from our Scholars

“Kevin was a fantastic individual. He was extremely passionate about helping marginalised groups and trying to do something positive to change their lives. He took several chances on me, encouraging me to do what was very taboo and difficult at the time - a study with vaping and the homeless in a not particularly vape-friendly Ireland. He supported me throughout. Kevin helped cement a passion in me for doing tobacco harm reduction with marginalised people, which I will continue for the rest of my life.”

Florian Scheibein, Ireland

“This is very sad news for global tobacco harm reduction. He was a true leader and I will miss him. His experience is still ringing in my ears – I wish I could listen more. May our Lord bless and comfort his family during this time of grief.”

Ashok Panday, Nepal

“My very first in-person contact with the THRSP was with Kevin. He was very supportive, welcoming and friendly. I was able to get to know him more at GFN in Warsaw. I will always associate Knowledge•Action•Change and the Scholars Programme with this kind man.”

John de Miranda, USA

Introduction

The Tobacco Harm Reduction Scholarship Programme is the jewel in the crown for Knowledge•Action•Change (K•A•C).

In just three years, the programme has had an unprecedented global impact with Scholars on six continents completing a wide range of successful projects.

We have already built an extensive new network of advocates raising awareness of tobacco harm reduction around the world and this report tells the story of our progress during the first of three years of our Programme.

Read on to find out why the Tobacco Harm Reduction Scholarship Programme (THRSP) was so urgently needed and meet some of the wonderful Scholars whose passion for education and research is changing the lives of smokers in their home countries and beyond.

Thanks to the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World

The THRSP is funded with a grant from the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World, Inc. (FSFW), a US nonprofit 501(c)(3) private foundation. The FSFW has no role in the planning or execution of this project.

Introduction to the THRSP

Meet Our Scholars

Focus on Malawi – A THRSP Success Story

Global Impacts

KAC Academy and Mentor Scheme

Table of Contents

Introduction to the THRSP	1–5
Introduction	1
Background	2–3
The Tobacco Harm Reduction Scholarship Programme (THRSP)	4
THRSP in Numbers	5
Meet our Scholars	6–18
Professor Dr. Mihaela Răescu	6–8
Samrat Chowdhery	8–10
Yusuff Adebayo Adebisi	11–13
Sahan Lungu	13–14
Blandina Nkhata	14–15
Elisa Correa	16–17
John de Miranda	17–18
Focus on Malawi	19–21
A THRSP Success Story	19
THR Scholarships timeline in Malawi	20
THR Malawi	21
Global Impacts	22–29
K•A•C Academy and Mentor Scheme	30–32
Induction Programme	30
The K•A•C Academy – A Response to COVID-19	30–31
Mentor Scheme	31–32

Background

Globally 1.1 billion people continue to smoke. 80 per cent live in low and middle-income countries least able to support people to quit, or to treat smoking-related diseases. Every year, there are 8 million smoking-related deaths worldwide. More people die prematurely from smoking than from AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined.

But, despite millions spent on tobacco control efforts, the number of smokers now is the same as it was twenty years ago. While prevalence rates have declined in some countries, populations have increased. The urgent need for a solution is clear.

Tobacco harm reduction using safer nicotine products (SNP) has the potential to help millions of smokers move away from smoking. Most people who smoke want to improve their health but many had been unable to quit smoking until the arrival of SNP. Progress has been slow, but the Global State of Tobacco Harm Reduction, a K•A•C project, estimates that since the introduction of vaping devices and heated tobacco products at the start of this century, around 100 million people have switched either to these products or to Swedish snus or nicotine pouches.

For the last decade, **K•A•C has been at the forefront of advocacy for tobacco harm reduction.** Since 2011, our team has been building alliances with consumers, academics, researchers, regulators and policy makers, drawing on our collective experience of harm reduction in response to HIV/AIDS and illicit drug use.

K•A•C researches, informs and communicates new ways of preventing the harms caused to individuals and communities by smoking. In some mainly higher income countries, understanding is increasing about appropriate and effective, evidence-based regulation for harm reduction products and harm reduction strategies that use them.

But globally there is still a pressing need to improve communication on the relative risks of the various ways of using nicotine, to help people make informed choices and take control of their own health.

While the science indicates SNP are a potential game-changer for public health, many in tobacco control remain unconvinced, with some actively impeding the development of these new alternatives to smoking. International philanthropists fund agencies to oppose tobacco harm reduction, including specifically in low and middle income countries, where the need is greatest. UN agencies have yet to support it, despite harm reduction being integrated into responses to HIV/AIDS and substance use. It is disappointing that resistance sometime comes from those whose support for harm reduction in other fields should make them natural allies.

At K•A•C, we are keenly aware that capacity for research on tobacco harm reduction and SNP has been unevenly distributed around the world. Most has taken place in countries with strong public health structures and well-established

research groups. This has limited studies to certain populations and contexts. It has meant that people in low and middle-income countries who smoke or use other risky forms of tobacco, as well as marginalised groups in higher income nations, have been largely overlooked in the search for appropriate, accessible and affordable solutions to the smoking epidemic.

We recognised there was a need to increase the number of individuals and organisations around the world able to conduct contextually and culturally appropriate harm reduction research and communicate effectively with the public and policymakers..

We wanted to attract a passionate and diverse group of new advocates into the field from across the globe. We wanted to inspire them to take the movement into the future. We wanted to find the researchers of tomorrow.

To do this, we created and developed the Tobacco Harm Reduction Scholarship Programme (THRSP).

<https://thrsp.net>



The Tobacco Harm Reduction Scholarship Programme (THRSP)

In 2018, K•A•C launched the THRSP with five fundamental aims:

- ✓ to increase research and practice capacity in tobacco harm reduction;
- ✓ to expand the evidence-base for new technologies and products, which contribute to reducing smoking and improving both individual and population health;
- ✓ to introduce new thinkers, new ideas and new methods to tobacco harm reduction;
- ✓ to improve risk communication, through the use of social media and new technologies to disseminate information, particularly to isolated groups and communities;
- ✓ to target locations and populations where current activities and resources are limited, especially in low and middle-income countries where the need to build capacity is greatest.

In the following three years, **75 Scholars from 33 countries** joined our 12-month development programme and they have completed an astonishing variety of projects in all areas of tobacco harm reduction. We are pleased to say **18 of our graduates have gone on to become Enhanced Scholars**. This is an additional one-year programme that provides Scholars with the opportunity to delve even deeper into tobacco harm reduction and further advance their career development.

Our Programme grounds Scholars in the theory and practice of tobacco harm reduction, while building research capacity in the field and raising awareness of its implications for global public health policy.

The THRSP's aims are realised in a variety of ways. These include papers published in peer-reviewed scientific journals, the development of national and international tobacco harm reduction networks, the development of toolkits for practitioners, and the production of new media resources ranging from articles and films, to radio shows and podcasts.

Scholars work together and support each other's projects, while receiving individual mentoring from an extensive network of world-leading tobacco harm reduction experts. We are proud to say that a number of our outstanding graduates have been invited back to the THRSP to mentor subsequent cohorts.

Since its launch, the THRSP has proven a successful and cost-effective means of increasing knowledge about and evidence for tobacco harm reduction. Our Scholars have helped to disseminate credible and accurate information to policy makers and consumers alike. Read on to meet some of the remarkable people who have completed the Programme.

THRSP in Numbers

Launched in 2018, we have welcomed **75** scholars, from **33** countries onto our programme, **18** of whom have gone to Enhanced Scholarships

Total number of applications for the first **4** years is **260**

Overall completion rate for the first **3** years is **91%**

Survey feedback

100% report the THRSP has been beneficial to their careers – **86%** very beneficial, **14%** somewhat beneficial

100% report a positive effect on their work after the THRSP – with the majority, **82%**, reporting a 'very positive' effect

95% are still working in tobacco harm reduction after completing the THRSP – **50%** part time, **27%** full time and **18%** in a voluntary role)

87% met or exceeded their objectives during their time on the THRSP – with just **13%** partially meeting their objectives

Meet our Scholars



Professor Dr. Mihaela Răescu, Romania

Switching from combustible cigarettes to heated tobacco products (HTP) can boost the oral health of smokers and even increase the success of dental implants. These are the findings of two scientific studies completed by Professor Dr. Mihaela Răescu as part of the Tobacco Harm Reduction Scholarship Programme (THRSP).

It is well established that switching completely to safer nicotine products offers smokers the chance to reduce their risk of suffering from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), cardiovascular disease (CVD), and lung cancer. But the work of a Romanian Professor of Dentistry

shows the potential benefits of switching also extend to other areas of health and wellbeing.

A member of the Faculty of Dental Medicine at Titu Maiorescu University in Bucharest, Prof. Dr. Răescu developed an interest in tobacco harm reduction after a number of her patients asked if HTP could improve their oral hygiene. Keen to provide reliable information, Prof. Dr. Răescu scoured the scientific literature for answers. Unable to find any papers that addressed her specific clinical questions, she then decided to take matters into her own hands.

“When you’re chatting to patients about these subjects, it helps if you can tell them about your own evidence. So, when I saw an advert calling for applications to the THRSP, I knew this would offer me the perfect opportunity to carry out some novel research that could make a real difference not just for my patients, but for the dental profession as a whole.”

For her first Scholarship project, Prof. Dr. Răescu set out to identify what opportunities THR interventions might provide for routine dentistry. To do this, she offered a group of smoking patients the chance to switch from cigarettes to HTP before assessing any changes to their oral health and hygiene outcomes.

“Since the first part of the body that comes into contact with cigarette smoke is the mouth, I wanted to find out if switching to HTP would have a positive effect on the bacterial plaques that form on teeth. Analysing the results after nine months, my study showed there were fewer plaques for HTP users compared to smokers. Those that did develop were not as thick. This is really good news because thinner plaques are much easier and less painful to remove,

so patients who have switched have better oral health and can feel more relaxed about going to the dentists.”

The results of this project were picked up by the media and Prof. Dr. Răescu was invited to discuss her work on a Romanian TV show. She wrote a paper titled “Smoking and Oral Health in Romania; A Dentist’s Assessment” and presented her findings at the international congress. Education and Creativity for a Knowledge Based Society, held in Bucharest.

Keen to continue her work on tobacco harm reduction, Prof. Dr. Răescu successfully applied for an Enhanced Scholarship. This time, she set out to investigate the potential for HTP to improve the clinical outcomes for smokers requiring dental implants. Since smoking can affect the circulation of blood in the bone onto which the implants are anchored, these procedures are often unsuccessful for smokers. To overcome this problem, patients are normally asked to abstain from smoking for around six months, something many are unable to achieve.

“To help more smokers benefit from successful implants, I wanted to see if safer nicotine products could help. I offered smokers the chance to switch to HTP rather than trying and failing to go cold turkey from smoking. The study showed that for those who switched, the implants were more successful. In addition, a number of the participants gave up nicotine products altogether following the study. This wasn’t something I ever imagined happening so it was a really pleasing outcome for this research.”



While she has now finished her two projects, Prof. Dr. Răescu plans to keep playing an active role in tobacco harm reduction and is mentoring current THRSP scholar Dr. Niky Cumpătă as he examines the effects of smoking traditional cigarettes versus non-combustibles on the oral mucosa. A specialist in Oral and Maxillo-Facial Surgery, Dr Cumpătă, who also works at Titu Maiorescu University, helped Prof. Dr. Răescu complete the study on dental implants and was inspired to apply for a Scholarship after their collaboration.

“I felt very honoured to be asked to mentor Niky. I’m really pleased I can help him while continuing my involvement with the THRSP, as we still have a lot to do. There are more than 4 million smokers in Romania, so 25% of all adults, and 17% of all deaths in the country are attributable to tobacco smoking, but almost nobody here is talking about tobacco harm reduction. As a result of my scholarships, though, I’ve been able to share my results with other dentists and many are now advising their patients about the benefits of tobacco harm reduction. I’ve also met with representatives of the Romanian government and they were very interested in my findings but I still want to do more. Looking to the future, I’m planning to write academic papers on my research and I’m excited about the potential to present my findings at congresses and conferences. It’s such a nice feeling when you’re explaining what you do and you can see the enthusiasm in another person’s face. It’s this kind of response that makes me want to keep sharing the tobacco harm reduction message with as many people as I possibly can.”



Samrat Chowdhery, India

The potential for safer nicotine products to help India’s smokers and smokeless tobacco users has been demonstrated in a pair of studies carried out by Samrat Chowdhery as part of the Tobacco Harm Reduction Scholarship Programme (THRSP). As well as showing vaping offers a viable alternative for the country’s 100 million bidi smokers, Samrat’s work also proved that snus could encourage India’s 200 million smokeless tobacco users to switch from harmful traditional products that are linked to 350,000 deaths annually.

India accounts for roughly 10% of the world’s smokers and each year nearly one million deaths are attributable to tobacco smoking. In 2019, the Indian Government banned vaping and heated tobacco products, but Samrat’s research offers a

tantalising glimpse of the potential for tobacco harm reduction alternatives in the country should this legislation be overturned in the future.

Prior to his scholarship, Samrat was a founding member of Association of Vapers India (AVI), a consumer movement advocating for tobacco harm reduction. The group encouraged users of bidi, the most commonly smoked form of tobacco in India, to switch to vaping. Bidi is a low-cost, unfiltered smoking tobacco made from hand-rolled leaves and it is responsible for more than 80% of tobacco deaths in the country. Bidi smokers tend to come from predominantly rural and low-income groups with little access to healthcare and Samrat was looking for a way to help these populations transition to safer nicotine products.

“This was an idea that I’d been interested in for a long time, but I hadn’t been able to find any avenues through which to carry out this kind of project. That was until the THR Scholarship Programme came along. When I first heard about it, I immediately put in a proposal and was delighted to be accepted. For my first scholarship, I set out to evaluate the feasibility of vaping as an alternative for India’s bidi smokers and I also wanted to dispel the myth that vaping, or electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), would only work for higher income groups due to the costs involved. So my project set out to demonstrate that vaping could be used to transition smokers away from bidi effectively and that it could also be affordable.”

At the beginning of the development phase of his project, Samrat worked with liquid nicotine manufacturers to develop the product. Most liquid nicotine is made to suit the Western palate and research has found the importance of flavours in

encouraging smokers to make the switch to vaping. The manufacturers helped to make a bidi flavoured liquid that would be familiar to the participants of the study. He was also able to establish that after the initial outlay of buying the device, the cost of the liquids made vaping cheaper than smoking bidi. He enrolled 130 bidi smokers on the outskirts of Mumbai and was thrilled by the results.

“More than 90% of the bidi smokers who took part successfully made the switch and what was really surprising was the fact some were actually using vaping as a cessation device. They weren’t simply transitioning from bidi use to vaping. Instead, they would use vaping whenever they got the urge. They would take a few drags but they were actually quitting both products. That was a wonderful but unexpected result. These are the people who would otherwise not have had access to any means of cessation apart from counselling, so that was a really positive outcome from this study.”

For his Enhanced Scholarship, Samrat set out to extend this study beyond Mumbai to other Indian cities, but the project was cut short by the Government ban on vaping. Instead, he shifted his focus to see if snus, a legal product in India, could be a realistic alternative for the country’s smokeless tobacco users. Both have a similar method of intake, with users placing them under their lip, and, more importantly, snus is a well-established reduced risk product supported by decades of epidemiological evidence. This second study showed that snus was well accepted by users of smokeless tobacco and his work was noticed by Dr Marewa Glover, a public health academic from New Zealand, who invited him to join her on a study tour in Southern India to speak to tobacco farmers and bidi rollers.



“This proved to be an extremely insightful experience. The work also helped to establish my national and international profile, and boosted AVI’s credentials as serious participants in India’s tobacco control space. In addition, the research I did as a Scholar formed a key part of AVI’s submission opposing the vape ban to the Indian government. Parts of our submission were read out by legislators during the Parliamentary debate on the banning of ENDS.



Samrat’s advocacy efforts have continued to grow in scope and impact following his experiences as part of the THRSP.



“I’ve been part of panel discussions on vape bans in low and middle-income countries on various platforms and talk shows, and K·A·C invited me to speak at the launch of the latest Global State of Tobacco Harm Reduction report, *Burning Issues*, in 2020, for which I also wrote a foreword. I’ve been quoted in a number of articles published in international media, from the *New York Times*, to *Reuters* and the *Times of London*. At home a vast range of Indian news media platforms have quoted me and published my work. Then in 2020 I was elected president of INNCO (International Network of Nicotine Consumer Organisations) with a mandate to help bolster tobacco harm reduction advocacy in developing countries during my one-year term in the role. All this has happened since participating in this Scholarship programme so it really has been a life-changing experience.”



Yusuff Adebayo Adebisi, Nigeria

A drive to reduce the harm caused by smoking in Africa has led to international recognition for one of the Tobacco Harm Reduction Scholarship Programme's graduates. A young pharmacist with a passion for improving global public health, Yusuff Adebayo Adebisi won a Diana Award for his work to raise awareness about the benefits of safer nicotine products (SNP) in his home country of Nigeria. The Diana Award is a prestigious accolade for young people working in social action or humanitarian work established in memory of Diana, Princess of Wales. Now an Enhanced Scholar, Yusuff plans to continue his work by establishing a Tobacco Harm Reduction research hub in Nigeria.

Low and middle-income countries are home to 80 per cent of the world's smokers and carry the biggest burden of death and disease associated with combustible and dangerous oral tobacco. During his Pharmacy course, Yusuff saw first-hand the impact smoking was having on those of his patients who were suffering with lung cancer. He wanted to help, but was unsure how to until a chance encounter on his phone.

"I got a message on a WhatsApp group suggesting people should apply for the Tobacco Harm Reduction Scholarship Programme. At the time I was new to tobacco harm reduction, so I clicked on the link. I started to find out more and was immediately interested in what Knowledge Action Change was doing. Everyone knows it is very difficult for people to quit smoking. Many have tried and failed a number of times. So why not try to get them to switch to something that is safer compared to cigarettes, something that can help them stop? That is what inspired my desire to learn more about tobacco harm reduction and continues to motivate the work I'm doing now."

While still a student at the University of Ibadan, Yusuff successfully applied to join the Programme. His first project raised awareness of tobacco harm reduction approaches in Nigeria, with outreach to, and training for, other pharmacists, healthcare professionals and fellow emerging global health experts. He also forged links with drug policy advocacy groups in Nigeria. While harm reduction approaches are increasingly offered for illicit drug users to improve individual health and prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, little attention is paid to people's damaging use of combustible tobacco.

"Many people in the world know about safer nicotine products. They know what tobacco harm reduction

can do for them and they know the benefits. But in Africa, many people don't have that information. There's a real inequality of information and that has a big impact because people from this part of the world are already dying more from smoking-related diseases compared to those in higher income countries. That's why telling people about tobacco harm reduction in Africa is so important, and that awareness can't stop. We need to keep letting people know more about these life-saving products."

At the age of just 24, Yusuff has already published over 50 articles in academic journals including *The Lancet*, *Tropical Medicine and Health*, *Journal of Global Health*, *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, *Health Security*, *Conflict and Health* and *Global Health Research and Policy* among others. He plans to publish a number of articles based on the work of his two Scholarship projects and he says studies and reports on tobacco harm reduction have proven to be powerful tools during his advocacy work.

"There is unfortunately a lot of misinformation out there that you have to deal with. When I've met with people to discuss safer nicotine products, some will raise concerns, saying they've heard about vaping devices killing people in the US. To reassure these people, I share science papers to show them it was not the devices that were at fault, it was the drugs and black market products being put in them. When I then provide people with reliable information about safer nicotine products and show them reports like those produced by the *Global State of Tobacco Harm Reduction* and *Public Health England*, they want to embrace them. You just need to start these conversations."

During his Scholarships, Yusuff has shared his knowledge about tobacco harm reduction with officials but he knows it can be challenging to bring about change. "It's very difficult to influence the political will. Instead, one of the things I'm doing through my projects is to enlighten the young people of Nigeria because we are the future. We are the next generation of policy makers so if we can be knowledgeable about tobacco harm reduction, then one day, when we are in positions of power, we'll be able to make changes. It's going to be a gradual process, but the future starts now and we need to invest in it."

Looking forwards, Yusuff plans to conduct a review study to assess what is known about tobacco harm reduction across Africa. "I want to find out whether there are any local challenges or barriers to tobacco harm reduction that need to be addressed. It is so important to collect evidence from an African context, because much of the research to date has been carried out in countries with strong public health structures, well-established research groups and on a limited range of populations."

Yusuff has ambitious aims for the future but he can also reflect on a remarkable few years in tobacco harm reduction, topped off with his Diana Award. "It was an incredible honour to receive this award for my work in advancing health research. It's even more special because the recipient doesn't work towards it, rather they demonstrate their suitability through their work. I was nominated by my mentor, Dr Don-Eliseo Lucero-Prisno of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the Founder of *Global Health Focus*. This achievement makes me motivated and super excited to do more."

While his journey with the Programme still has some distance left to run, Yusuff hopes others will follow in his footsteps. “The Scholarship has allowed me to grow personally and professionally. I now have the opportunity to advance my knowledge on tobacco harm reduction and contribute to making an impact within my home country. In addition to this, the Scholarship has allowed me to develop my research interests in the field of tobacco harm reduction. I strongly recommend this Scholarship for everyone who wants to make a meaningful impact where it matters. The programme is life-changing.”



Sahan Lungu, Malawi

Sahan was working as a Business Consultant advising tobacco farmers about the potential of moving to alternative crops when he discovered the programme through THR Scholarship Manager, Chimwemwe Ngoma. For his first project he teamed up with fellow Scholar, Blandina Nkhata, to create a short documentary on smoking and tobacco harm reduction in Malawi ([link to output card](#)). The film examined the current awareness of safer nicotine products (SNP) among both smokers and health professionals, highlighting the need for more education for both groups. The documentary has been shown on two Malawian TV stations and Sahan discussed tobacco harm reduction on a range of television programmes. He also shared his work at conferences and met with Technical Directors

from the Malawian Ministry of Health's Non-Communicable Diseases team.

Inspired by his first project, Sahan progressed to the Enhanced Scholarship, where he is now testing the feasibility and acceptability of snus among women living in rural areas in Malawi who use smokeless tobacco. Snus is a widely used oral SNP in Scandinavia. Its popularity in Sweden is associated with that country having the lowest rate of smoking-related mortality in Europe and half the average EU rate for smoking-related disease. Sahan's new project hopes to establish snus's potential as an alternative to the more harmful smokeless tobacco products and he continues to be motivated by the impact he can have on Malawi's smokers.

"Receiving these Scholarships has been life-changing for me. Not only have I been able to interact with people from a wide range of different backgrounds during my projects, I've also experienced firsthand how this work in tobacco harm reduction can make a huge positive difference in people's lives."



Blandina Nkhata, Malawi

After helping THR Scholarship Manager, Chimwemwe Ngoma, organise events in Malawi, Blandina became very interested in the potential for safer nicotine products to help the country's 1.1 million smokers. She successfully applied to the Programme with a proposal to create a film exploring attitudes on smoking and tobacco harm reduction in one of the world's poorest countries. With similar aims to fellow Scholar, Sahan Lungu, the pair joined forces and they created a compelling documentary that posed questions about what affordable SNP might look like in low and middle-income countries.

"The concept of tobacco harm reduction is really new here in Malawi and most people, including smokers, don't know anything about safer nicotine

products. I wanted to spread awareness of the positive effects tobacco harm reduction can bring to smokers and I also wanted to educate the general population. That's why it was so pleasing to get our film shown on local TV stations. These are the channels that are most accessible to anyone living in Malawi so we were able to get our film seen by a range of people in different parts of the country."

To create their film, Blandina and Sahan travelled to local communities and met with people from all walks of life. "We talked to them and learnt about their day-to-day lives. We discussed their smoking experiences and their knowledge about tobacco harm reduction. We also told them about safer alternatives to smoking, so I'm really proud to have made this film. It will help a lot of people in Malawi to have a better understanding of what tobacco harm reduction is all about, and a clear picture about safer nicotine products."

Talking about her experience of the Programme, Blandina said: "The Scholarship has opened a new chapter in my career. It has helped me a lot, I have learnt new things and I have been encouraged to be proactive in my country in tobacco harm reduction. I encourage people across the world to apply for the Scholarship and be part of something bigger."





Elisa Correa, USA

A filmmaker from Chile, Elisa produced a high-quality short documentary on the impacts of the smoking and vaping ban in New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) properties for her Scholarship. Elisa was introduced to the Programme by tobacco harm reduction expert, Helen Redmond, when the pair were working for Community Access, a non-profit organisation helping people living with mental health concerns. With Helen as her mentor, Elisa conducted interviews with a number of NYCHA residents over a period of four months. She investigated the real-world consequences of a law that meant public housing inhabitants in the city were no longer allowed to smoke in their homes or vape in common areas. Elisa also met community organisers and saw firsthand the effects of an ill-considered policy on smokers and those seeking

healthier alternatives. The film featured in Filter magazine and is now used as a learning resource for other THRSP Scholars.

Elisa said: “I hadn’t seen many people smoking in New York in general, but, when I started meeting residents of NYCHA properties, there were so many smokers and it seemed to be a problem mainly affecting those in lower income groups. Many of the people I got to know were aware they needed to stop, but they said smoking made them feel better. Then when the pandemic happened, they started to smoke even more due to anxiety. They said they couldn’t give up, even if they received tickets from the authorities for fines they then couldn’t afford to pay. Making this film, it became increasingly clear that tobacco harm reduction products had the potential to help large numbers of smokers in these buildings and elsewhere. Going forwards, NYCHA’s residents need more support and, if the aim of these measures is to reduce smoking, then the authorities need to encourage people to try alternatives like vaping. The solutions are there but the US as a whole, and NYCHA in particular, need to get better at providing the tobacco harm reduction tools that are available.”

Speaking about her Scholarship, Elisa said: “I didn’t know much about tobacco harm reduction before I met Helen, but I would love to do more in this area. I learned so much during the 12 months of the Programme and I was taught the tools I needed to be a good researcher. I also met Scholars from a wide range of different countries and I hope the network I built will help me continue to support tobacco harm reduction in future.”



John de Miranda, USA

Smoking prevalence is extremely high among people seeking treatment for dependency on alcohol or other drugs, with US studies suggesting anywhere from 49% to 98% smoke. Yet, as John de Miranda revealed in his first Scholarship, treatment programmes often look the other way on smoking, despite its high health risk. John teaches alcohol and drug counsellors in his role at the University of California, San Diego. He saw an opportunity to change things, and developed the Smoking and Recovery Toolkit during his Enhanced Scholarship. It aims to give individuals and service providers the resources they need to address smoking rates using a tobacco harm reduction approach.

“The high smoking rates in these treatment programmes really is a life and death issue, and continued failure to deal with this problem means



we're killing off our community at an earlier age unnecessarily. I've been part of the drug and alcohol field for more than 30 years and my work has been my life. But my new passion for tobacco harm reduction, during the last three years, has given me the chance to challenge a treatment community that has become stodgy and set in its ways. The Smoking and Recovery Toolkit is the last contribution I can make in my career to try to improve things, because the people in these programmes who continue to smoke are not dying from the ramifications of their drug addiction, they're dying from lung disease. Trying to combat this tragic situation is what motivates me now and will continue to motivate me in the future."

Since he started his first Scholarship, John has written extensively on the subject of tobacco harm reduction and has had a number of opinion pieces published by *Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Weekly*. The same title wrote an article about his toolkit and two of his stories have appeared in *Addiction Professional HMP Global Network*. He has also featured twice on the *Beyond Risk and Back* podcast, as well as presenting at the West Coast Symposium on Addiction, the Association of Recovery Community Organizations annual meeting 2020, the Cape Cod Symposium on Addiction and the California Substance Abuse Conference.

Focus on Malawi – A THRSP Success Story

With a total of nine Scholarships and four Enhanced Scholarships over the first three years of the THRSP, Malawi has benefited from significant investment from the Programme. This support has been rewarded both with excellent results for individual Scholars and with broader high-level impacts, including, in 2020, a commitment from the Ministry of Health to incorporate tobacco harm reduction elements in forthcoming national policy. But why focus on Malawi – and what's behind the Programme's success here?

The context: an economy tied to tobacco

- ✓ Malawi is one of the world's poorest countries, with an economy that is heavily dependent on agriculture.
- ✓ 65% of the country's GDP comes from the production of tobacco, which employs an estimated 75% of the population.
- ✓ Families depend on tobacco as a key income source; it may be the only crop they grow.
- ✓ Global demand for tobacco is in decline, leading to ever lower market prices.
- ✓ As a mainstay of the economy, tobacco is deeply politicised.
- ✓ Consequently, while smoking is a common risk factor for non-communicable diseases in Malawi, tobacco control structures and support for smokers to quit are lacking.
- ✓ Recently the Government of Malawi has been leading calls for agricultural diversification, with tobacco farmers encouraged to move to crops such as groundnuts, soy beans or industrial hemp.
- ✓ The scale of the economic transition required is substantial – but the political will is there.



“We need an exit strategy to transition our farmers to crops that are more sustainable and more profitable. I am calling on the Ministry of Agriculture to begin consultations with all stakeholders to come up with a timeframe within which Malawi's economy will be completely weaned from tobacco.”

Dr. Lazarus Chakwera, President of Malawi, speaking at the opening of tobacco trading season in April 2020.

THR Scholarships timeline in Malawi

2018/2019

Two Malawian Scholars began their projects in the first year of the Programme. One considered the potential health and socioeconomic impacts of THR in Malawi while Chimwemwe Ngoma established information dissemination campaign THR Malawi as a powerful online and social media presence (see below).

2019/2020

The success of these first two Malawian Scholars was recognised when both were chosen for Enhanced Scholarship places in the following year. Thanks to their outreach, around 40 applications were received from the country for the 2019 Programme, leading to the recruitment of five new Scholars whose projects examined:

- Factors affecting adoption of vaping devices (e-cigarettes) in Malawi.
- Tobacco use and THR in Malawi. This short film was a joint project by Blandina Nkhata and Sahan Lungu, two Scholars on a shared grant and was shown on two Malawian TV stations, leading to interviews about tobacco harm reduction with the filmmakers.
- Education on tobacco harms and safer use.
- The use of THR products in Malawi and of possible locally made alternatives to combustible tobacco.

2020/2021

A Malawian Scholar was recruited as a THRSP Mentor following successful completion of his Enhanced Scholarship and three Enhanced Scholars from Malawi examined:

- Use and toxicity of a local oral tobacco product, ngirimbo. Use of this home-produced or small-scale product was discovered during THR Scholar Vita Mithi's first project. With tobacco growing and use embedded in indigenous people's cultures, Vita conducted a toxicology study, to determine whether ngirimbo could be promoted as a culturally available and acceptable safer nicotine product. The landmark study revealed the product has some toxic elements in elevated levels, with further research required.
- Whether it was possible to produce snus using Malawian-grown tobacco leaf. Patrick Kuyokwa's project concluded that snus could be locally produced, providing an economically viable safer nicotine product for consumers in Malawi.
- The feasibility of local snus production. Patrick's work was developed further by Sahan Lungu, whose project received technical input from the Malawian Ministry of Health. Snus can now be considered a suitable potential safer nicotine product for many tobacco users in Malawi because of the country's history of oral tobacco use and the low cost of snus production.



THR Malawi

Since 2018, a comprehensive and sophisticated network of mutually supportive Scholars and Ambassadors has grown from nothing, mainly under the aegis of THR Malawi. A well-functioning tobacco harm reduction network has been established in a country which does not have tobacco control structures.

Chimwemwe Ngoma set up THR Malawi as an information dissemination project during his first Scholarship in 2018. He reflects on the organisation's development.

"THR Malawi has evolved from an information dissemination project into a consumer group, registered with the Malawi Government. We're here to break the misconceptions some people have around safer nicotine products and how they relate to reducing smoking harms in Malawi.

"We participate in local and international conversations on tobacco harm reduction.

Scholars in Malawi work together to maximise impact, and THR Malawi has recruited 101 THR volunteer ambassadors, some of whom have gone on to become Scholars in their own right. We've introduced journalists and health professionals to the concept of tobacco harm reduction at workshops, which were also attended by officials from the Malawi's Ministry of Health.

"In 2020, the Deputy Director for NCDs at the Ministry expressed a commitment to and made a public announcement about the Ministry's intention to incorporate the use of tobacco harm reduction products in their mental health and capacity strategy. This felt like a major step forward, for THR Malawi and for the future health of our country's people."

THR Malawi plays an active part in national and international conversations about tobacco harm reduction, partnering with the pan-African Campaign for Safer Alternatives (CASA), the International Network of Nicotine Consumer Organisations, the World Vapers' Alliance, EU for Snus and other groups. In 2019, representatives travelled to Kenya to attend the CASA launch and later that year, THR Malawi hosted a conference in Lilongwe, with a range of regional and international speakers including Patrick Kuyokwa, THR Scholar, Gregory Conley, President of the American Vaping Association and Jon Derricott, the THRSP Programme Manager.

THR Malawi has also hosted launches for K·A·C's GSTHR project. A two-day event for the Malawian launch of the No Fire, No Smoke report was attended by government representatives, academics, farmers, advocates, NGOs and journalists and in 2020, THR Malawi co-hosted the global launch of the second GSTHR report Burning Issues with a live-streamed event.

As well as continuing to direct the activities of THR Malawi from Lilongwe, Chimwemwe Ngoma has recently joined the team as THR Scholarship Manager.

Global Impacts



The THRSP is a truly global programme. So far, Scholars have been based in the 33 countries shown on the map above. Here are just a few of their achievements to date.

Malawi | USA | India | Nigeria | Kenya | Poland | Bangladesh | Romania | Brazil | Lithuania | Mexico | New Zealand | Norway | Pakistan | Sweden | Uganda | Estonia | UK | Ireland | Nepal | Germany | Ghana | Greece | Bulgaria | Malaysia | Netherlands | Afghanistan | DRC | Zambia | Colombia | Latvia | Costa Rica | Burkina Faso

Establishing THR Malawi

Communications / Media

Malawi

Chimwemwe Ngoma

For his Enhanced Scholarship, Chimwemwe set up THR Malawi, an organisation that shares the latest knowledge on tobacco harm reduction and nicotine science with the people of Malawi. The website provides a range of resources that put science-based information in the hands of consumers and allow them to make informed decisions about their health. After completing his projects, Chimwemwe was invited to mentor other Scholars and he is now helping to support tobacco harm reduction worldwide after being recruited to join the KAC team as THR Scholarship Manager. To find out more about his experiences, read Focus on Malawi section.



<https://thrmalawi.info/>

Presentation at the International Conference on Biomedical and Cancer Research

Policy and influence

India

Dr. Sree Sucharitha, M.D.

Our Enhanced Scholar Dr. Sree Sucharitha, M.D. and her colleague Dr. S. Manikandan presented at the International Conference on Biomedical and Cancer Research in February 2021. Drs. Sucharitha and Manikandan showcased their work on assessing the levels of cotinine, a metabolite of nicotine with a long half-life, in the urine of migrant workers in Chennai. This group is especially vulnerable to high tobacco use and poor health outcomes. The study demonstrated that cotinine measurement has



potential to offer a better understanding of tobacco use prevalence, as self-reporting is unreliable, and that targeted cessation and tobacco harm reduction interventions for this population should be actively pursued.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3k7Tkb-dFNo>

A systematic review of literature on vaping as a potential harm reduction intervention among adolescents using risky tobacco

Research and practice

Nepal

Ashok Pandey

Ashok, a researcher at the Nepal Health Research Council, undertook a review with his co-authors of the existing scientific literature on vaping as a potential harm reduction intervention for adolescents already using tobacco in risky ways such as smoking. The review followed the Standard Cochrane method, covering articles published between January 2003 and June 2018. The resulting

paper is available to access as a preprint on ResearchGate.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328378537_Effect_of_E-cigarette_in_Harm_Reduction_among_the_Adolescents_-_A_Protocol_for_a_Systemic_Review_Preprint



Launching *Filter*

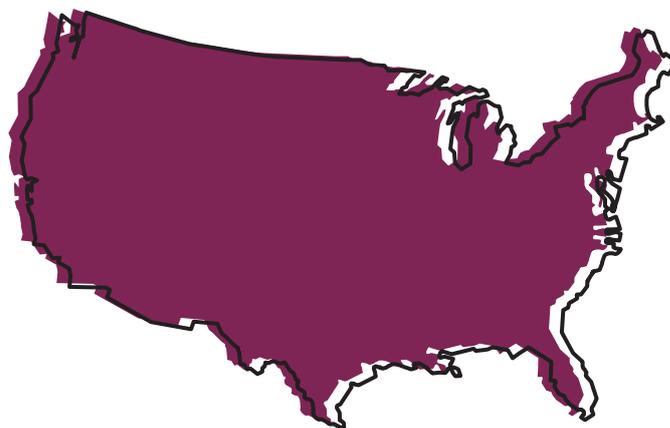
Communications / Media

USA

Will Godfrey

In September 2018, Will founded the news website *Filter* with the help of his Scholarship. *Filter*'s mission is to advocate through journalism for rational and compassionate approaches to drug use, drug policy and human rights. Since the start, tobacco harm reduction has been fully integrated into the magazine's vision.

In the first six months following its launch, *Filter* had already commissioned, produced and published 40 pieces of written and video content featuring tobacco harm reduction. These included original reports, op-eds, essays, interviews, media



critiques and news items. Its articles have been translated and republished on a number of foreign language sites. The website also provides comment and analysis on a range of research studies in the tobacco harm reduction field, helping to disseminate the latest scientific information to non-specialist audiences.

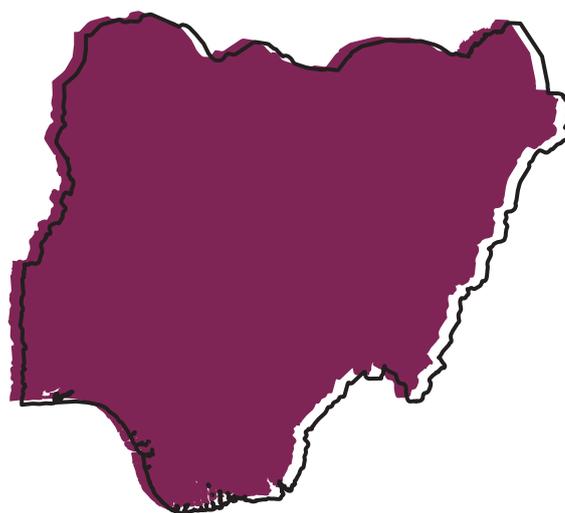
Nigeria Is Crying Out for Vapes That Smokers Can Afford

Communications / Media

Nigeria

Uche Olatunji

Filter published Uche's article on the need to make tobacco harm reduction affordable for smokers in Nigeria. In a THR Nigeria survey of smokers in Lagos, more than two thirds of respondents reported they would like to switch to a less harmful alternative. Yet 60 per cent said that the price of vaping devices in the country was a major barrier to switching. In a country where single-stick sales are still common despite being illegal, the low cost of cigarettes make them accessible to everyone –



driving experimentation and use among children and teenagers. THR Nigeria continues to work to raise awareness of the potential of tobacco harm reduction among policymakers and consumers alike.

<https://filtermag.org/nigeria-vapes-afford/>

Snus Revolution Podcast

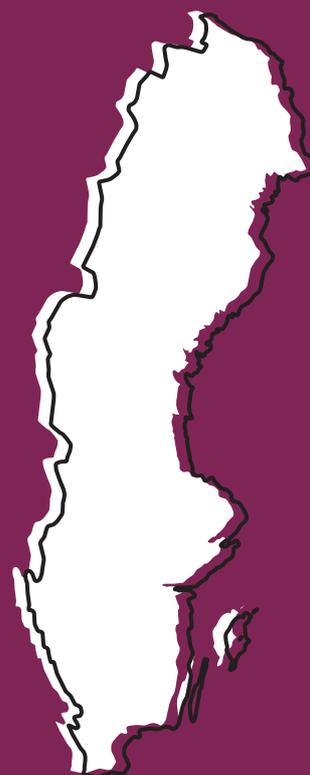
Communications / Media

Sweden

Bengt Wiberg

The Snus Revolution podcast is a collaboration between 2021/22 Scholar Bengt Wiberg, from Sweden, and former Scholar Michael McGrady, from the US. With a mix of discussion, snus news and interviews, Bengt and Michael use the podcast to share the message of tobacco harm reduction and how snus could offer a significant contribution to a smoke-free world in the future.

<https://snusrevolution.org/>



Study on the effects of providing vapes to homeless smokers in Ireland

Research and practice

Ireland

Florian Scheibein

While working as a research assistant and PhD researcher at the Waterford Institute of Technology, Florian wanted to see if providing vapes to people accessing homeless services in Ireland could help them quit smoking. The use of combustible cigarettes is widespread among homeless populations. They are disproportionately affected by tobacco-related diseases such as chronic

obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and Florian's study showed vaping could be effective for this population. His paper, originally published in *Harm Reduction Journal*, was then cited by the Cochrane Review on Electronic cigarettes for smoking cessation. Florian also wrote about his findings in an article published in *Filter*.



Toxicological assessment of the Malawian oral smokeless tobacco product ngirimbo

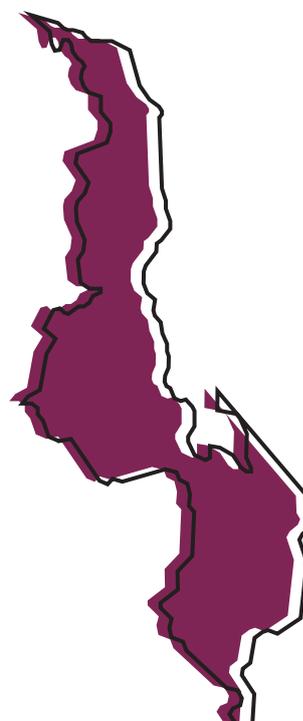
Research and practice

Malawi

Vita Mithi

Ngirimbo is a form of oral smokeless tobacco used by smokers in Malawi. For his Enhanced Scholarship, Vita performed a range of scientific tests on ngirimbo used in the Chitipa District of Malawi to determine the concentration of toxic heavy metals, minerals of potential toxicity and other harmful chemicals found in the samples. A preprint of his research, published on Research Square, suggests that prolonged use of ngirimbo is a significant health risk to people with chronic diseases.

Nonetheless, ngirimbo provides a valid method of tobacco harm reduction and a potential smoking cessation tool.



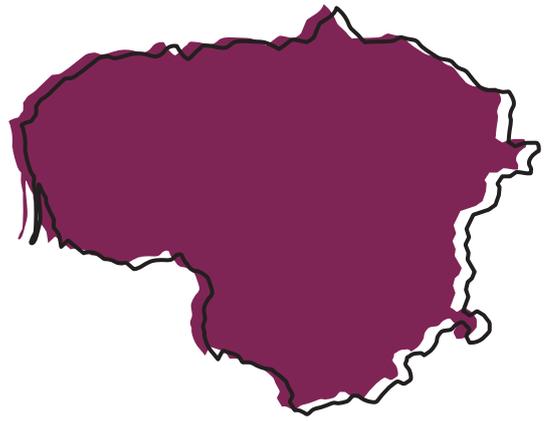
Assessing the tobacco harm reduction knowledge base of healthcare staff in Lithuania

Research and practice

Lithuania

Aušra Širvinskienė and Dovilė Mačiulytė

Lithuania has no national smoking cessation programme while novel tobacco and nicotine products are portrayed by the media as dangerous. Since 2019, behavioral support to quit smoking is offered at five branches of the Republican Centre for Addictive Disorders (RCAD), a healthcare institution that provides medical, psychological and social services to people experiencing alcohol,



drug or tobacco dependency in Lithuania. For their Scholarship project, Aušra and Dovilė set out to assess the tobacco harm reduction knowledge base of RCAD staff, as well as to provide them with training. Their research revealed a general lack of awareness among RCAD specialists about novel tobacco and nicotine products. But they found those who attended their training modules went on to understand the benefits of harm reduction measures.

Exploring the impact on vaping in Norway after implementation of the EU's Tobacco Product Directive

Research and practice

Norway

Helene Berg

It is currently illegal to sell e-liquid containing nicotine for vaping in Norway, so the country's vapers have to buy these products abroad. Norway has declared it will lift its ban on e-cigarettes with nicotine when it adopts the EU's Tobacco Products Directive (TPD), and Helene wanted to study the impact of this new legislation by carrying out surveys with vapers before and after its implementation. While the new laws were expected in 2020,



they have since been delayed, so Helene was unable to complete both parts of her project. But her first survey produced some interesting findings. Only 9% of the vapers are under 30 years of age, a fact that should reassure policymakers worried that legalisation will recruit young people to vaping. She found that while Norway's vapers currently use relatively low levels of nicotine, many of them started with higher levels. Therefore, any law restricting the legal limit to 20 mg/ml could prevent some smokers quitting, as they needed higher levels of nicotine to make the switch successfully by not returning to combustible cigarettes.

Feasibility study of local snus production using Malawian-grown tobacco

Research and practice

Malawi

Patrick Kuyokwa

While little known in Malawi, snus is a widely used oral safer nicotine product in Scandinavia. Its popularity in Sweden is associated with that country having the lowest rate of smoking-related mortality in Europe and half the average EU rate for smoking-related disease. For Patrick's Enhanced Scholarship, he explored the feasibility of local snus production using Malawian-grown tobacco leaf. This project complements a snus-use feasibility study being conducted by fellow Scholar Sahan Lungu (for the web version, insert link to

Sahan's case study). Patrick concluded that snus could be locally produced, providing an economically viable safer nicotine product for consumers in Malawi.



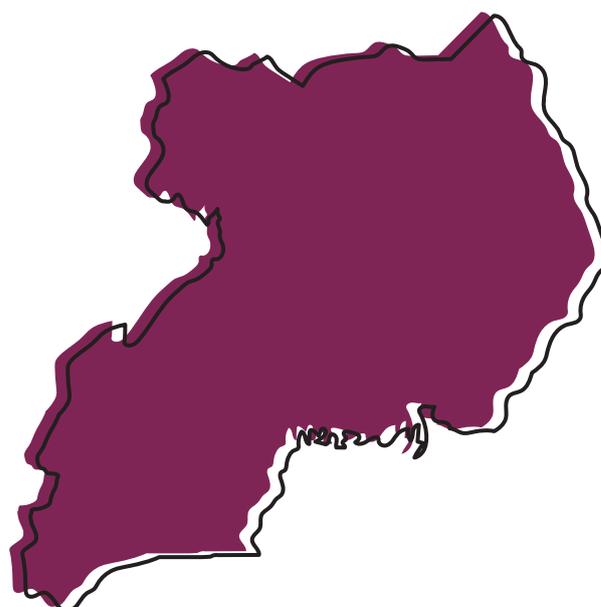
THR Uganda website

Communications / Media

Uganda

Joel Sawa Wamumbi

THR Uganda's website supports its function as an information dissemination organisation set up to share accurate information on tobacco smoking and nicotine. Set up by Joel, the site offers Ugandan smokers information on the risks associated with smoking and the new opportunities offered by integrating a tobacco harm reduction approach into the fight against smoking-related death and disease. The resource also provides information on lower risk alternatives to smoking – including informing Ugandan readers that the manufacture, importation, sale and distribution of vaping devices are all currently illegal in their country.



<https://thruganda.info/>

Surveying the tobacco harm reduction knowledge of Greek healthcare professionals working in smoking cessation clinics



Research and practice

Greece

Eleni Diamantopoulou

Greece has the highest smoking prevalence in the European Union according to the latest Eurobarometer survey (2017). But Eleni's survey found Greek healthcare professionals working in both public and private smoking cessation clinics in Athens have poor knowledge levels about nicotine, vaping devices and heated tobacco products (HTP). Despite the fact nicotine is not a carcinogen, more than 40% of respondents mistakenly believed

nicotine's contribution to smoking-related diseases was "extremely important" while a further 25% believed it was "important". In addition, while Public Health England estimates that vapes are 95% less harmful than smoking, nearly 70% of the Greek healthcare professionals who completed the questionnaire would not recommend smokers to switch to vaping devices or HTP in a bid to quit combustible cigarettes. The study's findings suggest the lack of tobacco harm reduction knowledge among those working in these clinics may have a negative impact on the provision of appropriate and reliable counseling to smokers in Greece who are looking to quit.

Kibera Tobacco Harm Reduction Network

Communications / Media

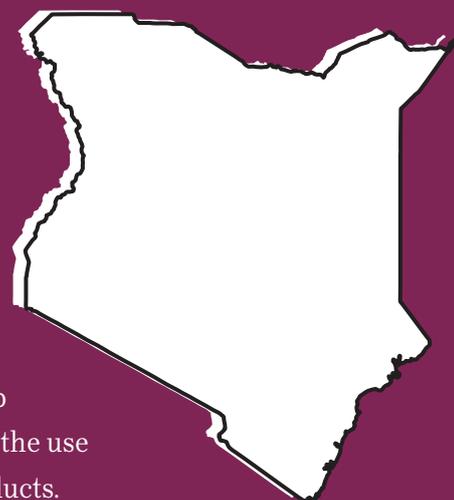
Kenya

Christopher Abuor

With the number of cigarette smokers in Kenya increasing, Christopher's project aimed to empower the residents of 10 villages in Nairobi's Kibera slum to take control of their health. The resulting Kibera Tobacco Harm Reduction Network has directly engaged more than 1,000 community members. These include five Community Health Workers, who gained popularity as champions of tobacco harm reduction within their health facilities, and a further 10 community tobacco harm reduction champions who received specialist

training before leading weekly group meetings to promote the use of safer nicotine products.

The project uses Community FM stations and has had a particular focus on the creative arts. With low literacy levels, many members of the community have only been introduced to the field through the Kibera Tobacco Harm Reduction theatre group. Every Sunday they perform street theatre on the health risks associated with tobacco smoking while educating the community about safer alternatives. They have also been invited to appear in schools where they have informed not just the children, but teachers as well.



K•A•C Academy and Mentor Scheme

Our Scholars are making a real difference to the lives of smokers all around the world. We have a similar ambition to make a difference to them. That's why we invest so much into their development from the minute they start the THRSP. Here are some of the key features we have developed that make our programme unique and so successful.

Induction Programme

For our Scholars to get the most out of their projects, we know it is crucial they begin with a baseline level of knowledge about tobacco harm reduction. That is why we carefully devised an Induction Programme to kickstart their scholarship. For the first two years of the programme, every Scholar was invited to attend the Global Forum on Nicotine in Warsaw so we chose to run the inductions there. This allowed us to point individual Scholars to those aspects of the conference which were most relevant to their projects.

It also provided them with the opportunity to:

- ✓ meet their peers;
- ✓ have a one-to-one session with the Programme Manager;
- ✓ network with experts in the field
- ✓ meet their agreed mentor, where possible (see section on the Mentor Scheme below).

The Induction Programme itself was delivered by experts in the field, including Professor Gerry

Stimson and Jessica Harding of K•A•C, Clive Bates, Karl Lund and Charles Gardner, formerly from the Foundation for a Smoke Free World, now Executive Director of the International Network of Nicotine Consumer Organisations (INNCO).

A short video of the first Induction Programme can be found at <https://scholarships.kachange.eu/>

The K•A•C Academy – A Response to COVID-19

As the COVID-19 pandemic took hold in the early months of 2020, it became clear that the face-to-face Induction Programme enjoyed by the first two cohorts of Scholars would not be possible. It was therefore necessary for us to quickly design an online platform to deliver this part of the programme for our third cohort. As with many unanticipated problems, we arrived at an innovative product which not only provided Scholars with an induction, but was also a much more interactive and in-depth resource. Rather than merely filming the experts' presentations and holding Q&A sessions, we developed a multimedia approach to be completed over a longer period of time. We also designed a bespoke new website, The K•A•C Academy. This platform is open only to Scholars, K•A•C personnel and mentors, and it now offers various features and functions that go beyond our original provision.

The Induction Programme is divided into three streams. One focuses on the scholarship process

itself, introducing Scholars to each other and providing frameworks for them to start their 12-month projects. The second stream focuses on basic tobacco harm reduction, while the third takes a deeper dive into some of the more complex aspects of the field. Each stream consists of videos and conference presentations, academic articles, news reports and questionnaires, against which Scholars and mentors could measure their learning and progress.

The website contains a variety of features:

- ✓ the Induction Programme itself;
- ✓ a noticeboard for news and announcements;
- ✓ a feature enabling Scholars to talk to each other to provide mutual support, help and guidance;
- ✓ a resource library of key tobacco harm reduction research papers;
- ✓ a help desk.

Going forwards, the K·A·C Academy website could be opened up to people who wish to complete the Academy but do not wish to pursue a scholarship, particularly as the Academy develops and more topics are added. If this happen we would seek to have the programme accredited.

In 2021, the Academy was reviewed and updated (this will be annual task). It was also moved to a platform with increased functionality.

2021 also saw the inauguration of a monthly seminar programme featuring prominent voices and experts within the tobacco harm reduction

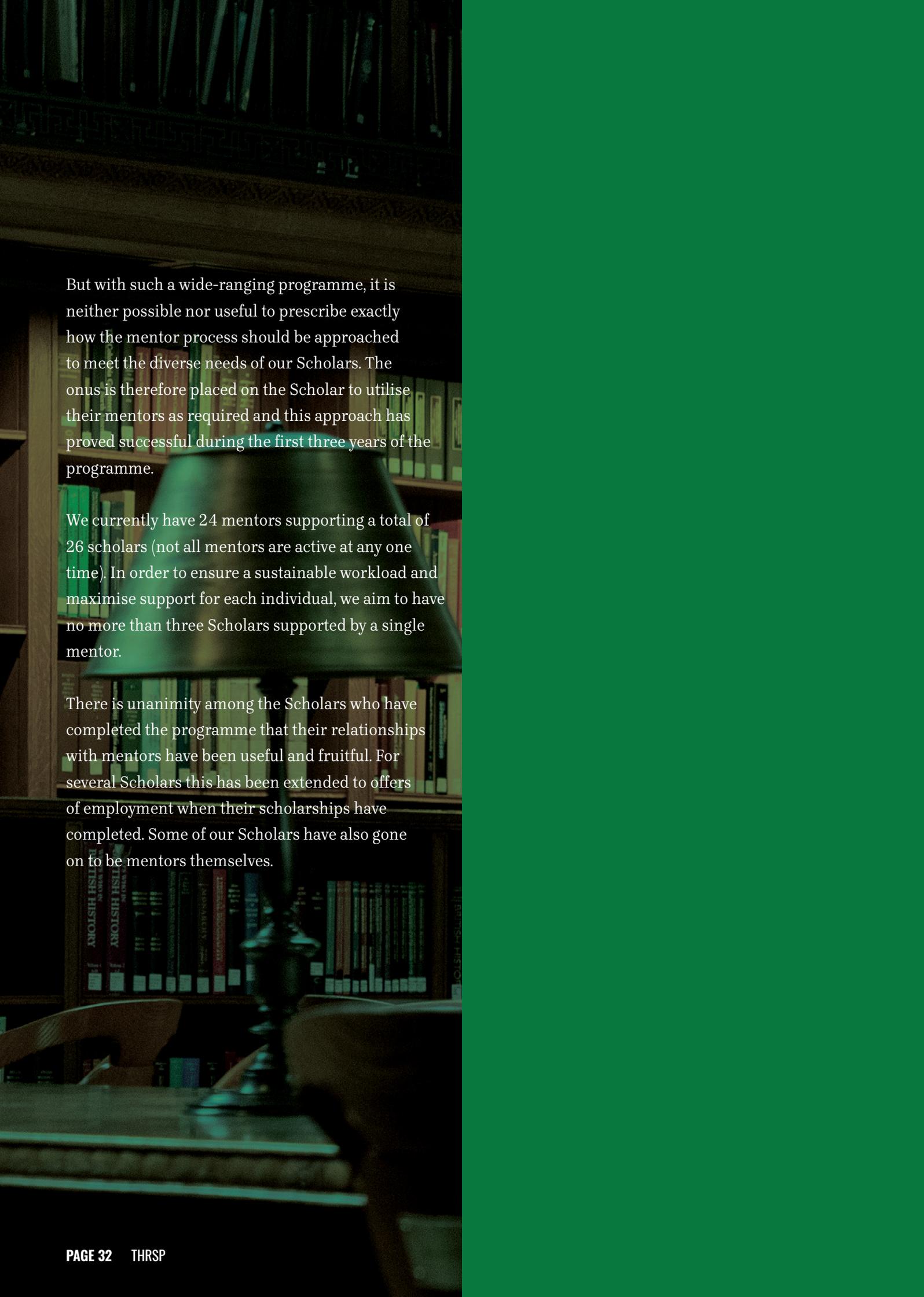
community. Initial feedback suggests the seminar programme has been a useful and popular addition for Scholars.

In future years, as the pandemic subsides, the Induction Programme will consist of a hybrid programme involving a combination of both the face-to-face elements delivered in the first two years, underpinned by the online K·A·C Academy.

Mentor Scheme

Where possible, the mentor scheme aims to match each of our Scholars with an acknowledged expert from their area of study. Each Scholar is assigned a mentor early in their programme. The role of our mentors is to help the Scholar to achieve their aims and objectives by providing support and guidance where necessary.

The scheme itself is very flexible to ensure that every Scholar's needs are best met and that the project is well served. For example, one of our Scholars who undertook a demonstration project supplying safer nicotine products to homeless smokers worked with two mentors. One was a social scientist who assisted with the more academic aspects of the project. The other was an experienced consumer of safer nicotine products who ensured the equipment used in the project was robust enough to be of use to the homeless population in question. This example illustrates the breadth of knowledge and experience required from our mentor cohort.



But with such a wide-ranging programme, it is neither possible nor useful to prescribe exactly how the mentor process should be approached to meet the diverse needs of our Scholars. The onus is therefore placed on the Scholar to utilise their mentors as required and this approach has proved successful during the first three years of the programme.

We currently have 24 mentors supporting a total of 26 scholars (not all mentors are active at any one time). In order to ensure a sustainable workload and maximise support for each individual, we aim to have no more than three Scholars supported by a single mentor.

There is unanimity among the Scholars who have completed the programme that their relationships with mentors have been useful and fruitful. For several Scholars this has been extended to offers of employment when their scholarships have completed. Some of our Scholars have also gone on to be mentors themselves.

The THRSP – the next three years

The Kevin Molloy Fellowships

In his role as Head of the THRSP (2018 – 2021), Kevin was instrumental in the establishment of the Programme. At K•A•C, we wanted to celebrate his contribution to the lives of the Scholars he worked with, and to create a legacy for future THRSP participants. With the generous support of our funder, the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World, we are delighted that from 2022, the THRSP will be offering up to three career development fellowships in Kevin's name as a living tribute to our friend and colleague.

The Kevin Molloy Fellowships will last for up to two years. Applications will be open to graduates of our Enhanced Scholarships Programme, ensuring 'rising stars' from low and middle-income countries continue developing their careers in THR, building further capacity in the tobacco harm reduction field around the world.

Looking to the future

The Tobacco Harm Reduction Scholarship Programme is going from strength to strength. The Scholarships Team has adapted creatively to the disruptions of the pandemic. 27 Scholars from 18 countries are taking part in the Programme as part of the 2021/2022 cohort and application numbers continue to increase year on year as the word spreads.

You can find more information about taking part in the Programme, as well as interviews with past and present Scholars and a showcase of their work, at <https://thrsp.net>.

Thanks to the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World

When K•A•C devised the concept for the THRSP in 2017, we approached Derek Yach, the Executive Director of the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World.

What we were proposing had never been done before in our field, which remained in a formative phase. The Programme set out to challenge the status quo. And it was significant in scope and scale. But Derek immediately understood the vision, seeing the potential that the Programme offered to develop a new generation of tobacco harm reduction researchers and communicators, particularly in the low and middle-income countries where need is greatest. We remain grateful for the ongoing support offered by Derek and the Foundation to the Tobacco Harm Reduction Scholarship Programme and our Scholars and Mentors worldwide.

We were also touched by the Foundation's immediate and positive response when we wanted to honour Kevin's memory with the establishment of the Kevin Molloy Fellowships.



<https://thrsp.net>