

Mr. Sundar Pichai, CEO  
Google LLC  
1600 Amphitheatre Parkway  
Mountain View, CA 94043

October 28, 2020

Dear Mr. Pichai,

We represent tobacco control, public health, corporate accountability, and consumer protection organizations fighting to reduce tobacco use and its deadly toll around the world. **We are writing today to urge Google to immediately remove and adopt a policy to prohibit applications that encourage purchase or consumption of smoking and vaping products in the Google Play store.**

Tobacco use is the world's leading cause of preventable death, killing eight million people around the world each year. Further, as tobacco smoking is a known risk factor for many respiratory infections and increases the severity of respiratory diseases, "a review by public health experts convened by the WHO on 29 April 2020<sup>1</sup> found that smokers are more likely to develop severe disease with COVID-19, compared to non-smokers." There is also emerging evidence<sup>2</sup> that vaping can also harm lung health.

In recent years, tobacco companies have increasingly used technology platforms to target young people<sup>3</sup>. Over the last few months, tobacco and nicotine companies have exploited the COVID-19 crisis<sup>4</sup> to market and promote special online and mobile delivery application offers for their harmful products. Philip Morris International and British American Tobacco have flooded Instagram and Facebook with ads for cigarettes<sup>5</sup> like Marlboro and Lucky Strike and heated cigarettes like IQOS and Glo. Similarly, Juul has fueled a youth e-cigarette epidemic in the U.S., driven by the company's "patently youth-oriented" social media advertising<sup>6</sup>. Following a decision and public announcement by Apple to prohibit and remove applications promoting use of tobacco products and e-cigarette/vaping on November 15, 2019, nearly 200 related applications were removed from the Apple Store<sup>7</sup>.

As tobacco and nicotine product technology evolves and the industry seeks to exploit every opportunity to promote their dangerous products, we are concerned Google has not yet taken similar steps as Apple to protect Google Play store users. In the Google Play store, we found several applications that appear to be popular with Android users promoting smoking and vaping. For example:

- With over 1 million installs, "Vape Tool<sup>8</sup>" offers directions to create vape liquids and maintenance of vaping devices.
- Produced by tobacco giant, Altria, the "MHQ<sup>9</sup>" app supports the Marlboro rewards program, offering coupons and loyalty points for Marlboro cigarettes. The Google Play store notes MHQ has been installed more than 1 million times.

In response to tobacco and nicotine companies exploiting their platforms to addict the next generation, momentum is building among the world's leaders in the technology

industry to adopt and enforce policies to protect their customers from the deadly harms of tobacco and nicotine addiction. Amazon<sup>10</sup>, Apple<sup>11</sup>, Facebook and Instagram<sup>12,13</sup>, and Snap Inc<sup>14</sup> have all either adopted or optimized their user policies to prohibit promotion of tobacco and vaping products.

Indeed, Google has already taken steps to protect its users from tobacco and e-cigarette marketing with a strong policy prohibiting tobacco and vaping product advertising and promoting product use on its search engine. **Today, we are calling on Google to take the next step to protect its users from the global tobacco epidemic by adopting a policy to prohibit applications that encourage purchase or consumption of smoking and vaping products in the Google Play store and immediately removing all such applications.**

Time is truly of the essence to protect the next generation from the global tobacco epidemic and we urge you to act immediately. We are happy to discuss any ways in which we can help and/or support your next steps.

Sincerely,

Alianza libre de humo Argentina (ALIAR), Argentina  
Asociación Argentina de Medicina Respiratoria, Argentina  
Austrian Council on Smoking and Health, Austria  
Assistance for Social Organization and Development (ASOD), Bangladesh  
Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Arts (BITA), Bangladesh  
Bangladesh University of Health Sciences, Bangladesh  
Development Organization of the Rural Poor (DORP), Bangladesh  
Dhaka Ahsania Mision, Bangladesh  
Human Development Research Centre, Bangladesh  
National Anti Tuberculosis Association of Bangladesh - NATAB, Bangladesh  
National Heart Foundation of Bangladesh, Bangladesh  
PROGGA- knowledge for progress, Bangladesh  
Training and Research Institute of Medicine, Agriculture & Nutrition (TRIMAN)  
Nutriceuticals Limited, Bangladesh  
VOICE, Bangladesh  
WAVE Foundation, Bangladesh  
Young Power in Social Action, Bangladesh  
Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL), Belgium  
Belgian Foundation Against Cancer, Belgium  
Kom op tegen Kanker, Belgium  
Alianza Bolivia Libre Sin Tabaco, Bolivia  
Fundación Interamericana del Corazón Bolivia, Bolivia  
Association for Addiction Prevention (NARKO-NE), Bosnia and Herzegovina  
Progressive Reinforcement of Organizations and Individuals (PROI), Bosnia and Herzegovina  
Youth Movement Revolt (Omladinski pokret Revolt), Bosnia and Herzegovina  
ACT Health Promotion, Brazil  
Lotus Pediatric Clinic, Cambodia

Cambodia Movement for Health (CMH), Cambodia  
Action on Smoking and Health Canada, Canada  
Airspace Action on Smoking and Health, Canada  
Chile Libre de Tabaco, Chile  
WHO Collaborating Center for Tobacco and Economics, University of International Business and Economics, China  
Asian Consultancy on Tobacco Control, Hong Kong, China, China - Hong Kong  
Asociación Colombiana de Educación al Consumidor, Colombia  
Fundación Anáas, Colombia  
Asociación Nacional Segunda Oportunidades de Vida (ANASOVI), Costa Rica  
Red Nacional Antitabaco de Costa Rica, Costa Rica  
Alianza Dominicana Anti Tabaquismo, Dominican Republic  
Centro Endocrinología y Especialidades, Dominican Republic  
Colegio Instituto Evangélico-Samuel Reyes Director, Dominican Republic  
Sociedad dominicana de Neumología y cirugía de Torax, Dominican Republic  
Sociedad Dominicana para el Estudio de la Obesidad (SODEO), Dominican Republic  
Fundahabla El Salvador, El Salvador  
Sumate, El Salvador  
Smoke Free Partnership, European Union  
Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) Finland, Finland  
Comité National Contre le Tabagisme, Paris France, France  
Tobacco Control Alliance in Georgia, Georgia  
BLUE 21 / Unfairtobacco, Germany  
Blossom trust, India  
Centre for Multi Disciplinary Development Research, India  
Consumer VOICE, India  
Institute for studies and transformations (IST), India  
Maya India, India  
Movement for Alternatives and Youth Awareness, India  
National Law School of India University, India  
Paneer HIV positive women network, India  
PASUMAI THAAYAGAM Foundation, India  
Salaam Bombay Foundation, India  
Society for social transformation, India  
Star Youth Association (SYA), Andhra Pradesh, India, India  
Tamil Nadu Tobacco Control Network, India  
Vinoba Sewa Ashram, India  
Voluntary Health Association of India - VHAI, India  
Alliance of Independent Journalist - AJI Jakarta, Indonesia  
Association of Indonesian Health Insurance and Insurance Management Experts (PAMJAKI), Indonesia  
Center for Indonesia's strategic development initiatives (CISDI), Indonesia  
IKK Strada indonesia, Indonesia  
Indonesia Agribusiness and Agroindustry Cooperative Union (GKAAI) , Indonesia  
Indonesian Consumer Organisation/YLKI, Indonesia  
Indonesian Heart Association, Indonesia

Indonesian Public Health Schools Association, Indonesia  
Jakarta City Citizens Forum (FAKTA) Indonesia, Indonesia  
Jakarta Veterans National Development University, Indonesia  
Kajen Hospital Pekalongan (RSUD Kajen), Indonesia  
Kementerian Kesehatan, Indonesia  
Lentera Anak Foundation, Indonesia  
Medicuss Foundation, Indonesia  
National Committee On Tobacco Control, Indonesia  
PC PAFI BOJONEGORO JATIM, Indonesia  
Pusaka Indonesia, Indonesia  
Sahas Inisiatif, Indonesia  
School of Public Health, University of Indonesia, Indonesia  
ThinkWell LLC, Indonesia  
Iran Sociology Institution - Arak branch, Iran  
Iran's anti-smoking population, Iran  
Irish Cancer Society, Ireland  
Irish Heart Foundation, Ireland  
Smoke Free Israel, Israel  
Agenzia Nazionale per la Prevenzione, Italy  
Benessere Senza Fumo ONLUS, Italy  
Italian Society of Tobaccology (SITAB), Italy  
Tobacco Endgame Italia, Italy  
Wellness Without Smoke Association, Italy  
The Heart Foundation of Jamaica, Jamaica  
The Jamaica Coalition for Tobacco Control, Jamaica  
Japan Society for Tobacco Control, Japan  
"Salauat Astana" Public health union, Kazakhstan  
"Temekisiz" Public fund, Kazakhstan  
Smokefree Kazakhstan Coalition, Kazakhstan  
Kosovo Advocacy and Development Centre (KADC), Kosovo  
Climate Action Network (IndyACT), Lebanon  
Jeunesse Contre la Drogue (JCD), Lebanon  
Lithuanian Christian Youth Temperance Union "Zingsnis", Lithuania  
Lithuanian Medical Students' Association, Lithuania  
Lithuanian Tobacco and Alcohol Control Coalition, Lithuania  
Drug Fight Malawi, Malawi  
Chinampa voces del mundo, Mexico  
Coalición México Saludable, Mexico  
Colectivo Mujeres Construyendo Igualdad, Mexico  
Gracias No Fumo SC, Mexico  
Observatorio Ciudadano de Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos AC, Mexico  
Refleacciona con Responsabilidad A.C., Mexico  
Salud Justa MX, Mexico  
Focus NGO, Mongolia  
Preporod NGO (Rebirth), Montenegro  
People's Health Foundation, Myanmar

Stichting Rookpreventie Jeugd, Netherlands  
New Initiative for Social Development, Nigeria  
Association for a Better Pakistan, Pakistan  
Human Development Foundation (HDF), Pakistan  
National Alliance for Tobacco Control, Pakistan  
Pakistan National Heart Association (PANA), Pakistan  
Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC), Pakistan  
Socio Economic & Educational Development Organization, Pakistan  
Alianza Enfermedades No Transmisibles Perú, Peru  
Cedro, Peru  
Comision Nacional Permanente de Lucha Antitabaquica - COLAT, Peru  
Action for Economic Reforms, Philippines  
Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) Philippines, Philippines  
Child Rights Network, Philippines  
Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Alliance, Philippines, Philippines  
Health Justice Philippines, Philippines  
Philippine Legislators Committee on Population and Development Foundation (PLCPD),  
Philippines  
Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA), Philippines  
Department of Public Health and Social Medicine, Medical University of Gdansk, Poland  
Alliance congolaise pour le contrôle de tabac : ACCT, RD Congo  
Aer Pur Romania, Romania  
Colegiul Medicilor Din Romania, Romania  
Healthy Romania Generation 2035 Association, Romania  
Maternity Advocacy Medicine Education Association, Romania  
National Centre for Studies in Family Medicine, Romania, Romania  
Romanian Association for Health Promotion, Romania  
Romanian Society of Cardiology, Romania  
World Vision Romania, Romania  
Samoa Cancer Society, Samoa  
Association Health Mission, Belgrade, Serbia  
Slovenian Coalition for Public Health, Environment and Tobacco Control, Slovenia  
Youth Network No Excuse Slovenia, Slovenia  
International Youth Health Organization, Slovenia/ International  
Acción ciudadana por la salud y el avance de la ley de tabaco en España (XQNS)  
Initiative Spain, Spain  
Jeewaka Foundation, Sri Lanka  
Swarna Hansa Foundation, Sri Lanka  
Tobaksfakta, independent tobacco control organization, Sweden  
Tanzania Tobacco Control Forum (TTCF), Tanzania  
Action on Smoking & Health (ASH) Foundation Thailand, Thailand  
Health Funds for a Smokefree Netherlands (Gezondheidsfondsen voor Rookvrij), The  
Netherlands  
African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA), Togo  
Uganda Health Communication Alliance, Uganda  
NGO "Network of Responsible People", Ukraine

NGO Advocacy Center Life, Ukraine  
Centro de Investigación de la Epidemia de Tabaquismo (CIET), Uruguay  
Clinica Médica A Facultad de Medicina de Montevideo. Uruguay, Uruguay  
Espacio Calma, Uruguay  
Fumadores pasivos uruguay, Uruguay  
Sociedad Uruguaya de Tabacología (SUT), Uruguay  
Tobacco Control Research Group, University of Bath, UK  
Action on Smoking and Health DC, United States of America  
American Academy of Pediatrics, United States of America  
American Heart Association, United States of America  
Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, United States of America  
Cigarette Butt Pollution Project, United States of America  
Corporate Accountability, United States of America  
Truth Initiative, United States of America  
Vital Strategies, United States of America

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<sup>1</sup> WHO statement: Tobacco use and COVID-19, May 11, 2020 <https://www.who.int/news/item/11-05-2020-who-statement-tobacco-use-and-covid-19>

<sup>2</sup> BMJ “What are the respiratory effects of e-cigarettes?” BMJ 2019;366:15275

<sup>3</sup> Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, “New Investigation Exposes How Tobacco Companies Market Cigarettes on Social Media in the U.S. and Around the World” August 27, 2018 [https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/press-releases/2018\\_08\\_27\\_ftc](https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/press-releases/2018_08_27_ftc)

<sup>4</sup> Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, “BIG TOBACCO IS EXPLOITING COVID-19 TO MARKET ITS HARMFUL PRODUCTS” [https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/media/2020/2020\\_05\\_covid-marketing](https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/media/2020/2020_05_covid-marketing)

<sup>5</sup> Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, “Where there’s Smoke. There’s something behind the cigarettes you see on social media: a deceptive strategy from Big Tobacco to addict the next generation of smokers.” <https://www.takeapart.org/wherethersmoke/>

<sup>6</sup> JUUL Advertising Over its First Three Years on the Market Robert K. Jackler, Cindy Chau, Brook D. Getachew, Mackenzie M. Whitcomb, Jeffrey Lee-Heidenreich, Alexander M. Bhatt, Sophia H.S. Kim-O’Sullivan, Zachary A. Hoffman, Laurie M. Jackler, Divya Ramamurthi Stanford Research into the Impact of Tobacco Advertising Stanford University School of Medicine

<sup>7</sup> New York Times, “Apple to Ban Vaping Apps From Its Store,” November 15, 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/15/business/apple-vaping-apps.html>

<sup>8</sup> Google Play Store, “Vape Tool” application [https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.stasbar.vape\\_tool](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.stasbar.vape_tool)

<sup>9</sup> Google Play Store, “MHQ” application <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.marlboro.mhq.app&hl=en&gl=US>

<sup>10</sup> Amazon, “Policies, agreements, and guidelines / Restricted products / Tobacco & Tobacco-Related Products” [https://sellercentral.amazon.com/gp/help/external/help.html?itemID=200164910&language=en\\_US&ref=efph\\_200164910\\_cont\\_200164330](https://sellercentral.amazon.com/gp/help/external/help.html?itemID=200164910&language=en_US&ref=efph_200164910_cont_200164330)

<sup>11</sup> Apple Developer, “App Store Review Guidelines/ Safety 1.4.3” <https://developer.apple.com/app-store/review/guidelines/>

<sup>12</sup> Facebook, Advertising Policies, “Prohibited Content, 4. Tobacco and Related Products” [https://www.facebook.com/policies/ads/prohibited\\_content/tobacco](https://www.facebook.com/policies/ads/prohibited_content/tobacco)

<sup>13</sup> Facebook, “Community Standards, 4. Regulated Goods” [https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/regulated\\_goods](https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/regulated_goods)

<sup>14</sup> Snap Inc, “3. Prohibited Content/ 4.1. Inappropriate Content” <https://www.snap.com/en-US/ad-policies>