

# London Parliamentary-Style Debate Shows Why Sweden Is Beating Smoking — While Others Are Not

*Experts discussed how safer nicotine alternatives helped drive Sweden's smoking rate down to nearly 5%.*

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, January 19, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Sweden's sustained decline in smoking, now approaching 5%, was examined at a London event on December 4, 2025 through a parliamentary-style debate, exploring what is behind the country's long-term reduction in cigarette use. Hosted by the nonprofit Quit Like Sweden (QLS), founded by Suely Castro, the event brought together international experts, scientists, clinicians and consumer advocates to examine Sweden's approach to tobacco harm reduction and its implications for tobacco control and public health policy.



Dr Garrett McGovern, Clive Bates, Prof. Bernhard Mayer & Martin Cullip

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*Suely Castro*

Speakers pointed to large-scale switching from cigarettes to lower-risk nicotine alternatives as a key driver of Sweden's results. Compared with European Union averages, the country records 21 percent fewer smoking-related deaths, 31 percent fewer cancer deaths and 12 percent fewer cardiovascular deaths.

Opening the discussion, Suely Castro asked policymakers:

“If safer nicotine alternatives can save lives, what responsibility do we have to science, to fairness and to the people we serve?”

Led by Clive Bates of Counterfactual, a long-standing tobacco control expert, the discussion was structured as a rigorous, adversarial debate. Adopting a deliberately skeptical role, Bates drew on decades of policy experience to test the evidence, data and arguments presented, subjecting them to sustained scrutiny.

Martin Cullip, a former chair of the New Nicotine Alliance consumer advocacy group, said tobacco policy cannot be credible or effective if it excludes the voices of people who smoke or have switched to safer alternatives. He warned that global tobacco policy is increasingly restricting both access to safer nicotine products and open discussion.

Bernhard Mayer, a pharmacologist with expertise in nicotine research, warned that overly restrictive regulation — including strict limits on nicotine strength — risks driving smokers back to combustible

cigarettes. He said access to sufficiently satisfying nicotine levels is essential to prevent relapse and that a one-size-fits-all approach does not reflect real-world consumer needs.

Garrett McGovern, a physician specialising in addiction medicine, highlighted the role of flavours in helping smokers move away from cigarettes, saying enjoyment is central to success and that regular use alone does not constitute addiction in the absence of significant harm. He added that adult harm reduction and youth protection are not mutually exclusive when regulation is proportionate and evidence-based.

Closing the event, David Sweanor, an authority on health law and tobacco control policy, argued that taxation must reflect relative risk, with safer nicotine products priced below cigarettes to encourage smokers to switch. Uniform taxation, he said, may suit efforts to suppress nicotine use, but reducing death and disease depends on lower taxes for safer alternatives to avoid illicit markets and accelerate public health gains.

Suely Castro

Quit Like Sweden

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