

RESPONSE TO LETTER

Dear Editor:

Re: Bennett KP, Blake LN. Self-reporting and social desirability: The implications for e-cigarette data collection. [Letter] *Can J Public Health* 2016;107(1):e136. doi: 10.17269/CJPH.107.5641.

We would like to thank Bennett and Blake for their feedback on our article published in the September/October 2015 issue of the *CJPH*.¹ As outlined in our paper, standardized protocols were used to examine the availability and marketing of e-cigarettes in brick-and-mortar retail outlets. We have uploaded our data collection forms for these audit components as supplementary files (see ARTICLE TOOLS section on website) to provide additional information. Our study utilized measures with face validity that examined e-cigarette product characteristics, including type of product (disposable, tank system, liquid refills), nicotine content, flavour, etc., which were visible features directly observed on product packaging by our trained research assistants.

With respect to the audit of brick-and-mortar retail outlets, research assistants disclosed their task to store employees in order to ensure that data were collected for all available e-cigarette products, due to the fact that products may be displayed in different areas of different retail outlets (e.g., pharmacy or health section for grocery stores, point-of-sale for convenience stores, etc.). Despite Health Canada's position that only pre-approved nicotine-containing products can be sold, e-cigarette retailers

openly advertise and sell their products, and believe nicotine-containing products to be legal. Therefore, the likelihood of retailers misrepresenting the presence of nicotine in their products due to social desirability bias is relatively low. Nevertheless, self-reported data are always subject to some degree of bias. Therefore, we are currently testing products for chemical constituents, including nicotine, which will provide objective verification of self-reported data and product labelling.

Overall, we are confident that the findings of our study reflect the general state of the e-cigarette market in Canada, recognizing that the market continues to evolve in Canada and internationally, with respect to the type of products available for purchase. We also welcome improvements to the protocols used for environmental scans in these types of studies and thank Bennett and Blake for their comments.

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REFERENCE

1. Hammond D, White CM, Czoli CD, Martin CL, Magennis P, Shiplo S. Retail availability and marketing of electronic cigarettes in Canada. *Can J Public Health* 2015;106(6):e408–12. PMID: 26680433. doi: 10.17269/CJPH.106.5105.