FOREWORD

"Opportunity knocks, but doesn't always answer to its name."

–Mason Cooley

Many people both inside and out of the public health community have often suggested that we need to develop a more rational and coherent tobacco and nicotine policy – one that will serve public health interests for the next decade and beyond. Yet in spite of these calls, we continue to rely on traditional models of tobacco control, which have their roots in the 1980s and 90s, even though a great deal has changed during the last ten years. We also cling to the idea that all tobacco is equally harmful and that anyone associated with tobacco is part of an "evil empire". Then, anyone who takes issue with these views is quickly marginalized under a mantra of "you're either with us against us". But this is changing, as more and more people take the time to "educate" themselves about a wide variety of issues related to tobacco and nicotine.

This paper is a follow-up to a white paper I wrote in August 2006, entitled Tobacco and Tobacco Products at a Crossroads in the 21st Century. The paper focused on a series of issues pertaining to tobacco harm reduction (www.tobaccoatacrossroads.com). The focus of this paper is on what I will refer to as "smokefree" tobacco and nicotine products – those that are not combusted and which are, may, or may not be an important component of a harm reduction strategy to significantly lessen or even one day eliminate the use of combustible products such as cigarettes. This paper does not recommend any substitutes for the continued need for other effective tobacco control efforts (many of which have been outlined in a recent Institute of Medicine report released in June 2007). However, with a general consensus that noncombustible tobacco products are significantly lower in risk than combustible products and that nicotine replacement therapies (containing nicotine derived from tobacco) are even lower in risk, it seems both logical and necessary to begin a process by which we can have an open and more thorough discussion about the future of how these products can and should be produced, processed, manufactured, tested, labeled, distributed and marketed. Such a process of discussion must involve a range of interests that are committed to the notion that tobacco and tobacco product modification (whether tobacco- or nicotine-based) can play a role in reducing the incidence of disease and death. Merely relying on or hoping that a regulatory body like the FDA can do the job without the help or involvement of the private sector is neither prudent nor wise, even though such a third-party entity is essential in establishing the rules and regulations that will govern the tobacco and nicotine industries. Nor is it prudent or wise to maintain the "status quo" approach, which calls for waging an all-out war with the enemy to the exclusion of other strategic avenues. Understandably, but also unfortunately, tobacco control has not been generally effective at practicing or employing diplomacy either internally or externally. This must change. In addition, measurable, demonstrable and transparent change is going to have to come from other stakeholders and interests, including tobacco producers, tobacco manufacturers, pharmaceutical companies, biotech companies, among others.

As an additional caveat, please note that this paper is not intended to be a scientific study or a heavily annotated document. Much of the research that supports this paper can be found in the longer, aforementioned white paper. This paper is intentionally more compositional and essay-like in structure, designed to clearly communicate a proposed Road Map for change that encourages transparency and civil discourse on issues that can help shape policy changes, foster new relationships and expedite efforts to reduce the devastating toll caused by the use of cigarettes and other high-risk tobacco products.

To colleagues in the tobacco control, public health and scientific communities, I encourage you to step back and think about how serious discussions of harm reduction can occur and the role that product differentiation and product modification can play as a component of broader tobacco control efforts. To the producers of tobacco, I encourage you to begin to lay out a detailed strategy that will move your business towards a more standardized system for the production and testing of leaf that meets specific health and safety requirements. To tobacco manufacturers (new and old) and the pharmaceutical and biotech industries, I urge you to develop science-based, lower-risk products and commit to labeling and responsibly marketing your products based on the risks and relative risks of those products and as part of a regulatory scheme under the FDA.