

17 April 2024

Committee Secretary  
Committee of Law and Safety  
Parliament House, Macquarie Street,  
Sydney, NSW 2000

Dear Committee Secretary,

Re: NSW Committee on Law and Safety – Vaping Inquiry Supplementary Questions

The Alcohol and Drug Foundation (ADF) welcomes the opportunity to provide additional information to this inquiry into the regulation of the use of vaping products in NSW. Please find the ADF's responses to the supplementary questions below.

**Do you believe the Australian Government's proposed vaping reforms are well understood in the community?**

Anecdotal reports suggest that some vaping product store owners are unaware of the legal status of vaping products or are confused about their status. A recent survey conducted by the Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) of 35 young people and 22 youth representatives found that social media (68.6%) and friends and other young people (54.3%) are the main two sources of information about vaping. Over half of young people (57.1%) reported wanting more information about current and expected changes to laws regarding vapes, including use, purchasing and importing. Among youth sector workers, 77.3% also wanted more information about laws and regulations regarding vapes.<sup>1</sup> This data suggests that the proposed vaping reforms are not well understood in the community, and young people in particular want information about vaping laws that is useful, engaging and provided in the right contexts.

**What do you consider best practice in designing public health campaigns, particularly those aimed at young people?**

Public health and behaviour change campaigns can have profound impacts on community health and wellbeing. The ADF has significant experience in running targeted, evidence-based campaigns that deliver non-stigmatising health information to specific cohorts, including about [vaping](#). Our experience in delivering these campaigns has reinforced the fact that effective health promotion initiatives are those that are multi-layered and mutually reinforcing. Campaigns that aim to increase awareness of harms, or to provide public information, must sit alongside other action areas such as community engagement, research, monitoring and evaluation, in addition to necessary regulatory changes.

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Public health campaigns also need to be designed in partnership with their target audience, such as people who are curious about, experimenting with or regularly using vaping products. Recently, the Behaviour Change Collective partnered with VicHealth to develop profiles of young people and their attitudes towards vaping through surveys with almost 3,700 young people across Australia.<sup>2</sup> The report found that messaging for different cohorts with different relationships to vaping should be different – some will respond well to information about health risks, while others may respond better to hearing experiences of peers. Information and interventions should engage with people that individual cohorts go to for advice. For example, many young people who have experimented with vaping care about the opinions of parents and close friends, while others may look to other trusted individuals like sports coaches or influential public figures. Evidence-based approaches to target campaigns and interventions will deliver much stronger results than population wide messaging.

It is important to note that existing programs and campaigns to discourage uptake and use of vaping products will be significantly impacted by changes to the supply of vaping products. While current approaches are taking place within a context of high availability of vaping products, it may be the case that these products are far less available, if at all, in the future. As such, any responses to vaping in young people will need to respond to the changed context of availability and peer use.

### **Are current NSW programs and initiatives to help young people quit vaping adequate? How can they be strengthened or enhanced?**

Public data relating to approaches being currently taken to prevent uptake or continued use is limited. The ADF is concerned about reports of disciplinary approaches to use of vaping products by young people in schools. Experience in prevention and early intervention for alcohol and other drug use shows that disciplinary responses carry the risk of alienating young people and making them less likely to seek help.

The implementation of vape detectors in schools carries the risk of causing further harms to young people. Evidence from young people shows that use of vaping products can relate to a range of factors, including socialising with peers, and experimentation.<sup>3</sup> Disciplinary actions resulting from the presence of vape detectors may serve to lead children away from support. Experience with alcohol and other drugs demonstrates that stigma is a significant barrier to help-seeking, and that treating substance use or vaping through a disciplinary lens can create and reinforce stigma.

Further to this, disciplinary action that results in an individual being suspended or removed from school activities may play a role in exacerbating risk factors that a young person may be experiencing. If a young person is experiencing risk factors that are associated with greater likelihood of uptake of vaping or tobacco, suspension from school is likely to exacerbate those risk factors by removing the protective factors available at school, such as social connection, education, as well as peer and teacher support.

The ADF recommends a comprehensive health approach to the use of vaping products for young people. This includes:

- School-based social competence programs to teach individuals self-management skills as well as personal and social skills in complex situations.<sup>4</sup>

- Provision of balanced information about the consequences of vaping and penalties for possession of vaping products.
- Resources for parents and teachers to have open conversations with young people in their care about drugs and alcohol, including specifically targeted at vaping.

More work is needed to identify the information needs of high-risk communities regarding harms and available supports for vaping. This should include connecting with non-government organisations with strong links to these communities, including youth sector organisations, to ensure that they are well supported to disseminate this information to their membership.

**What action would you like to see the NSW Government take to ensure a higher degree of compliance with smoke-free environment regulations?**

The ADF acknowledges the importance of smoke and vapour free areas in public spaces. However, the enforcement of these regulations should not be based on criminalisation or fines. These penalties and criminalisation may further exacerbate risk factors for people who use vaping products by increasing financial strain, stigma, and isolation.

Among young people, disciplinary action from the use of vape detectors in schools may lead to increased harms by perpetuating stigma and delaying help-seeking. It is therefore vital that young people who are found to be vaping are offered non-stigmatising and non-punitive responses that do not lead to further harms.

The ADF recommends improving accessibility of information regarding vaping cessation programs and laws and regulations regarding vaping products through channels relevant to individual cohorts, including young people, using an evidence-based approach to understand their information access methods and needs.

Sincerely,



**Robert Taylor**

Manager – Policy & Engagement

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## References

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2. Behaviour Change Collective. Influencing Gen Vape: Summary Report. VicHealth; 2024. Available from: [https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-02/Influencing%2520Gen%2520Vape%2520Summary%2520Report-V08\[1\].pdf](https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-02/Influencing%2520Gen%2520Vape%2520Summary%2520Report-V08[1].pdf).
3. Watts C, Egger S, Dessaix A, Brooks A, Jenkinson E, Grogan P, et al. Vaping product access and use among 14–17-year-olds in New South Wales: a cross-sectional study. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health. 2022;46(6):814-20; Available from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1753-6405.13316>.
4. Faggiano F, Vignato-Taglianto FD, Versino E. School based prevention for illicit drugs. 2005.