

Vaping - An inquiry into reducing rates of e-cigarette use in Queensland

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*Vaping – An inquiry into reducing rates of e-cigarette
use in Queensland*

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Contents

Introduction.....	3
Recommendations.....	4
Response to Terms of Reference.....	4
References	7
Appendix 1: QNMU E-cigarettes (Vaping) Position Statement	8

Introduction

The Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union (QNMU) thanks the *Health and Environment Committee* (the Committee) for the opportunity to comment on *Vaping – An inquiry into reducing rates of e-cigarette use in Queensland*.

Nursing and midwifery is the largest occupational group in Queensland Health (QH) and one of the largest across the Queensland government. The QNMU is the principal health union in Queensland covering all classifications of workers that make up the nursing and midwifery workforce including registered nurses (RN), midwives, nurse practitioners (NP) enrolled nurses (EN) and assistants in nursing (AIN) who are employed in the public, private and not-for-profit health sectors including aged care.

Our more than 70,000 members work across a variety of settings from single person operations to large health and non-health institutions, and in a full range of classifications from entry level trainees to senior management. The vast majority of nurses and midwives in Queensland are members of the QNMU. As the Queensland state branch of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, the QNMU is the peak professional body for nurses and midwives in Queensland.

Through our submissions and other initiatives, the QNMU expresses our commitment to working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to achieve health equity and ensure the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives are heard. The QNMU supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the call for a First Nations Voice enshrined in our Constitution. The QNMU acknowledges the lands on which we work and meet always was, and always will be, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land.

The QNMU commends the Federal, state and territory governments for committing to work together to reduce the use of e-cigarettes through stronger legislation, enforcement, education and support, announced recently by the Hon Mark Butler MP, Federal Minister for Health and Aged Care (2023). We will address selected Inquiry terms of reference and include recommendations from the QNMU (2022) E-cigarettes (Vaping) position statement (Refer Appendix 1).

Recommendations

The QNMU commends the Queensland and federal governments for committing to take coordinated action to reduce e-cigarette use, as outlined in the recently released National Tobacco Strategy 2023-2030 (Commonwealth of Australia [Department of Health and Aged Care], 2023). We particularly recommend collaboration on implementing Priority Area 9 (***Strengthen regulations on e-cigarettes and novel and emerging products***) and Priority Area 11 (***Provide greater access to evidence-based cessation services to support people to quit the use of tobacco, e-cigarettes and novel and emerging products***) Actions, which include:

- Develop and implement additional measures to further restrict the marketing, availability and use and end-of-life disposal of all e-cigarette components in Australia, regardless of their nicotine content (Priority Action 9.1)
- Develop and implement measures to prohibit the sale of flavoured e-cigarettes, regardless of their nicotine content (Priority Action 9.2)
- Raise awareness about the marketing and use of e-cigarettes and their immediate and long-term impacts on individual and population health (Priority Action 9.3)
- Develop and implement an evidence-based comprehensive regulatory framework for e-cigarettes and all novel and emerging products that pose risks to tobacco control and population health (Priority Action 9.4)
- Prohibit the use of e-cigarettes and novel and emerging products in areas where smoking is prohibited (Priority Action 9.5)
- Prohibit advertising, promotion and sponsorship relating to e-cigarettes and other new and emerging products (Priority Action 9.6)
- Strengthen research, monitoring and surveillance activities pertaining to the marketing and use of e-cigarettes and novel and emerging products (Priority Action 9.9).
- Conduct an evaluation of smoking cessation services available in Australia and monitor innovative approaches to deliver smoking cessation services (Priority Action 11.1)
- Provide policy guidelines and accredited training in smoking cessation to health professionals and health workers and ensure these are regularly updated to reflect best practice (Priority Action 11.8) These smoking cessation programs should not promote the use of e-cigarettes as the evidence for their use as a smoking cessation aid is not conclusive.

Response to Terms of Reference

1. *The current status in Queensland relating to the:*
 - a. *prevalence of e-cigarette use, particularly amongst children and young people;*

E-cigarette related poisoning has increased substantially in Australia over the past five years, with most poisoning being experienced by toddlers and adults (National

Health and Medical Research Council [NHMRC], 2022). Specifically in Queensland, the Queensland Poisons Information Centre has experienced a 486% increase in calls since 2020 involving children under five years of age being exposed to e-cigarettes and vaping products (Davey & Rose, 2022). Despite smoking e-cigarettes (also called vaping) being banned in state schools, the Queensland Department of Education has reported that the number of drug-related suspensions has risen substantially in state schools over the past five years, with vaping driving this increase (O'Flaherty, 2023).

- b. *risks of vaping harmful chemicals, including nicotine, to individuals, communities, and the health system; and*

A systematic review examining the health impacts of e-cigarettes, recently commissioned by the Australian Department of Health, identified risks including addiction, poisoning, nicotine toxicity and lung injury (Banks et al., 2022). E-cigarettes which are labelled 'non-nicotine' have been found to contain nicotine in addition to several other chemicals (World Health Organisation, 2022). The NHMRC (2022) concludes that all people who use e-cigarettes are exposed to chemicals and toxins that have the potential to cause adverse health effects. Of particular concern is that vaping normalises and acts as a gateway to smoking, with non-smokers who vape being three times more likely to start smoking conventional smoking products than non-smokers who do not vape (Banks et al., 2022).

Health risks are also present for people who do not vape. There is moderate evidence for second hand exposure to nicotine, as the aerosols that are generated by vaping typically raises the particulate matter in indoor environments and contains nicotine and other harmful substances (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2022; World Health Organisation, 2022).

- c. *approaches being taken in Queensland schools and other settings relevant to children and young people to discourage uptake and use of e-cigarettes.*

The QNMU understands that School-Based Youth Health Nurses have been involved in strategies to prevent e-cigarette use in Queensland state schools (O'Flaherty, 2023). The QNMU supports investment by the Queensland government in the provision of educational programs for students about the health effects of e-cigarettes which could involve School-Based Youth Health Nurses.

2. *Opportunities to increase:*

- a. *awareness of the harmful effects of e-cigarette use (with and without nicotine) to an individual's health, and the effectiveness of preventative activities; and*
- b. *accessibility and effectiveness of services and programs to prevent uptake and continuing use of e-cigarettes.*

The QNMU commends the federal government for announcing its commitment to invest \$63 million for a public health information campaign in the 2023-24 Budget to discourage Australians from taking up vaping and smoking and encourage people to

quit (Minister for Health and Aged Care, 2023). We also commend the Queensland and federal governments for agreeing to work together to implement the *National Tobacco Strategy 2023-2030* commitments (Commonwealth of Australia [Department of Health and Aged Care], 2023) and for agreeing to establish a national *E-cigarette Working Group* to reduce e-cigarette use (Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care, 2023). The QNMU considers that coordinated action by the Queensland and federal governments, particularly in relation to the Strategy's Priority Area 9 Actions, will contribute to preventing the uptake and use of e-cigarettes. These Priority Actions include:

- Develop and implement additional measures to further restrict the marketing, availability and use and end-of-life disposal of all e-cigarette components in Australia, regardless of their nicotine content (Priority Action 9.1)
- Develop and implement measures to prohibit the sale of flavoured e-cigarettes, regardless of their nicotine content (Priority Action 9.2)
- Raise awareness about the marketing and use of e-cigarettes and their immediate and long-term impacts on individual and population health (Priority Action 9.3)
- Develop and implement an evidence-based comprehensive regulatory framework for e-cigarettes and all novel and emerging products that pose risks to tobacco control and population health (Priority Action 9.4)
- Prohibit the use of e-cigarettes and novel and emerging products in areas where smoking is prohibited (Priority Action 9.5)
- Prohibiting the advertising, promotion and sponsorship relating to e-cigarettes and other new and emerging products (Priority Action 9.6)
- Strengthen research, monitoring and surveillance activities pertaining to the marketing and use of e-cigarettes and novel and emerging products (Priority Action 9.9).

With regard to *Priority Area Action 9.3*, the Queensland and federal governments could develop integrated Health Promotion Plans to raise public awareness about the immediate and long-term health impacts of e-cigarette use, particularly targeted at priority groups, including children and young people. As outlined in our response to *Term of Reference 1c*, School-Based Youth Health Nurses are well placed to be involved in the education of secondary students at Queensland state schools regarding the harmful effects of e-cigarette use.

4. *A jurisdictional analysis of other e-cigarette use inquiries, legislative frameworks, policies and preventative activities (including their effectiveness in reducing e-cigarette use).*

The QNMU commends the federal and Queensland governments for agreeing to implement measures to prohibit the sale of flavoured e-cigarettes (Minister for Health and Aged Care, 2023). Given the role that confectionary and fruit flavours have in increasing the appeal and use of e-cigarettes among children and young people, at least seven countries, including New Zealand, have imposed bans on 'characteristic

flavour' e-cigarettes, which prohibits the sale of products that impart a characteristic flavour or aroma, except for tobacco (Greenhalgh & Scollo, 2023; Jenkins et al., 2023). Studies have found that prohibition of flavoured e-cigarettes in two states in the United States (Massachusetts and California) resulted in a reduction in the use of e-cigarettes (Greenhalgh & Scollo, 2023). The QNMU recommends that the Queensland and federal governments continue to monitor the use of e-cigarettes, following the implementation of these measures, to assess their effectiveness in reducing the use of e-cigarettes.

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Appendix 1: QNMU E-cigarettes (Vaping) Position Statement

E-cigarettes (vaping)



Introduction

E-cigarettes are devices that make vapour for smoking and the use of e-cigarettes is commonly known as vaping. The Department of Health (2020) states that e-cigarettes are not safe as hazardous substances have been found in e-cigarette liquids and in the aerosol produced by e-cigarettes.

E-cigarettes are often marketed as a method to quit smoking, however there is inconclusive evidence to show that they help or are safe (Department of Health, 2020).

The use of e-cigarettes among smokers and non-smokers is increasing across most age groups (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019). E-cigarettes may expose users to chemicals and toxins at levels that have the potential to cause adverse health effects (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2017).

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline the QNMU's position on the use of e-cigarettes.

Definition

e-cigarettes: electronic cigarettes that are battery-operated devices designed to look and feel similar to cigarettes or cigars, but don't burn tobacco (Health Direct, 2019). E-cigarettes are also known as e-cigars, electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), vape pens or personal vapourisers. They typically have a refillable cartridge or refillable tank containing substances such as propylene glycol, vegetable glycerine, liquid nicotine and flavourings, which are heated to produce a vapour that users inhale (Queensland Health, 2019).

Policy

It is the QNMU policy that:

- More research be undertaken into the health effects caused from e-cigarettes;
- Governments continue to provide and promote quit smoking programs that aim to reduce smoking rates in Australia. These cessation programs should not promote the use of e-cigarettes as the evidence for their use as a quit smoking aid is not conclusive;
- Employers are encouraged to support quit smoking programs for employees;
- E-cigarettes and related products should be subjected to the same restrictions as cigarettes.

Legislation

Under the *Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act 1998*, e-cigarettes are smoking products and subject to the laws in place for tobacco cigarettes.

E-cigarettes that contain liquid nicotine are regulated under Queensland's *Health (Drugs and Poisons) Regulation 1996* (HDPR) on the basis that it is a 'Dangerous Poison' under Schedule 7 of the federal 'Poisons Standard', published on the Therapeutic Goods Administration (Queensland Health, 2019). It is an offence for a person to manufacture, obtain, possess, prescribe, dispense, sell, advertise, use or destroy nicotine, unless the person is specifically authorised or holds an approval under the HDPR.

As of 1 October 2021, all nicotine vaping products are designated as prescription only medicines as per Schedule 4 of the 'Poisons Standards'. Consumers now require a valid doctor's prescription to purchase nicotine vaping products from Australian pharmacies (Therapeutic Goods Administration, 2021).

E-cigarettes marketing and promotion

The marketing and promotion of e-cigarettes, particularly on social media appears to target young people. The use of candy-flavoured e-cigarette juices, playful and youthful packaging and the use of social media influencers is essentially re-normalising smoking. This is a legitimate concern, potentially undoing the successful anti-smoking campaigns with findings suggesting that some young people progress from e-cigarettes to tobacco smoking (Australian Medical Association, 2015).

The marketing and advertising of e-cigarettes should be subject to the same restrictions as cigarettes and must only be available to those people over 18 years of age (Australian Medical Association, 2015).

Research

There is little research to date about the health effects of long term and/or chronic exposure to e-cigarettes. There is an uncertainty about the health risks of e-cigarettes and their efficacy as a smoking cessation method (Gotts, Jordt, McConnell & Tarran, 2019).

The World Health Organization (2020) states e-cigarette emissions typically contain nicotine and other toxic substances that are harmful to users and non-users who are exposed to the aerosols second-hand. This is supported by international research that suggests there is a possible link between the use of e-cigarettes and lung disease and that there may be an increased risk of heart disease and cancer (Department of Health, 2020).

With e-cigarettes being marketed as a method to quit smoking, more research is needed to determine if this is a safe method to assist with quitting smoking. The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has not approved any e-cigarette product as an aid to help smokers quit (Department of Health, 2019).

The QNMU supports further research into the effects e-cigarettes have on health and whether e-cigarettes assist with quitting smoking.

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