

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

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VAPING INQUIRY

ORYGEN SUBMISSION

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Orygen welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Health and Environment Committee inquiry into reducing rates of e-cigarette use in Queensland.¹ The submission highlights the risks of increasing rates of vaping among young people and correlations with experiences of mental ill-health. Although the Federal Government has announced forthcoming investment in harm reduction and the regulation of supply, vaping behaviour will continue to be a public and mental health issue.

ABOUT ORYGEN


Orygen is the world's leading research and knowledge translation organisation focusing on mental ill-health in young people. At Orygen, our leadership and staff work to deliver cutting-edge research, policy development, innovative clinical services, and evidence-based training and education to ensure that there is continuous improvement in the treatments and care provided to young people experiencing mental ill-health.

Orygen conducts clinical research, runs clinical services (including specialist services and five headspace centres), supports the professional development of the youth mental health workforce and provides policy advice relating to young people's mental health. Our current research strengths include: early psychosis, mood disorders, personality disorders, functional recovery, suicide prevention, online interventions, neurobiology and health economics.

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YOUNG PEOPLE'S HEALTH AND VAPING

There is limited available evidence on the short and long-term health impacts of vaping. The rise of vaping has outpaced public health, medical and regulatory responses. The incidence of vaping among young people who did not previously smoke is a public health and medical issue. The ready availability of vaping products, especially to young people aged under 18 years needs to be addressed through effective policy responses and enforcement.

Vaping products with nicotine are intended as a smoking cessation tool. A prescription is needed to purchase nicotine vaping products in Australia, however, fewer than 1-in-10 people report having a prescription.⁽¹⁾ There is disagreement over the benefits on vaping as a cessation tool. Disagreements include the relative harm, activity replacement, and the unevenness of available evidence.⁽²⁻⁴⁾ While not all vapes contain nicotine, the majority of users (58%) usually vaped nicotine.⁽¹⁾ The Therapeutic Goods Administration is currently considering reforms to the regulation of vaping products.

¹ Please note Orygen has also sent this submission (without the Queensland data analysis) to the Northern Territory Parliament which is undertaking a similar inquiry.

The Federal Government's recent announcement of forthcoming measures to reduce the harm of vaping products require the collaboration of the states and territories. This will include regulating the import and sale of vaping products.

VAPING IS INCREASING

The rate of vaping is highest and increasing at the greatest rate among young people, with increased use among females in particular.(5, 6) Young people are currently purchasing vaping products from individuals, retailers, online and social media. And most report that accessing vapes is "very easy, easy or quite easy".(6) In 2021, more than a third of 18 to 25 year olds in Australia reported having used e-cigarettes, and more than 20 per cent of 14 to 17 year olds (similar to 26 to 35 year olds).(7) Young people (14 to 25) who report vaping are more likely to have not smoked previously compared with adults.(8)

MENTAL HEALTH

Young people who report having ever vaped are 50 per cent more likely to also be experiencing mental ill-health.(8) There is a similar relationship with cigarette smoking.(9) This increases the comorbid physical health risks for young people with mental ill-health. The risks of poorer physical health outcomes increase with the severity of mental health symptoms, in part due to greater rates of smoking.(10) Conflicting claims of the reduced harms from vaping compared with smoking and recognition of the unknown and potential risks point to a need from cautious public health policies and regulation.(3, 4) For young people who did not previously smoke, evidence suggests that vaping has similar effects on lung function and cardiovascular function as smoking.(11, 12)

QUEENSLAND

Young Queenslanders (14-25 years) who reported having vaped were twice as likely to also report having a mental health diagnosis, and three out of ten reported high or very high psychological distress in the past four weeks.

POLICY SOLUTIONS

The available evidence indicates that more young people than other age groups are trying vaping or becoming more regular users. Young people experiencing mental ill-health are more likely to vape. Young people are at risk of missing the health benefits of reduced tobacco smoking achieved over the past decades as a result of increased rates of vaping, including young people who did not previously smoke.

Proactive policy solutions are needed to catch-up with the ready availability of vapes and take-up of vaping among young people. Policy solutions are needed in public health messaging on prevention and cessation for young people, vaping strategies in integrated mental health and alcohol and other drug services, stronger regulation and enforcement of importation, nicotine content and retail sale. As young people are the highest users of vapes, they should be involved in developing these policy solutions. Without the involvement of young people public health messages may miss the mark. Similarly, primary and specialist health practitioners need insight into the drivers of increased vaping and how to engage young people in behavioural health changes.

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