

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

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BULIMBA ELECTORATE YOUTH ADVISORY PANEL 2023



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Bulimba Electorate Youth Advisory Panel 2023 Submission

VAPING – AN INQUIRY INTO REDUCING RATES OF E-CIGARETTE USE IN QUEENSLAND

The Bulimba Electorate Youth Advisory Panel (BEYAP) 2023 would like to begin by thanking the committee for accepting and acknowledging our panel's submissions on the inquiry into reducing the rates of e-cigarettes use in Queensland. BEYAP is a panel of fourteen 16–25-year-olds who are eager to share the perspectives and ideas of youth in, and associated with, the state of electorate of Bulimba. Although vaping is an issue which impacts people from all age groups and backgrounds, we are aware of how pertinent it is particularly for pre-teens, teens and young adults.

Vaping and the use of e-cigarettes was first introduced as a revolutionary method to safely quit traditional smoking. With its appealing packaging and flavours, e-cigarettes were soon popularised among young people as a healthy alternative to smoking without the risk of addiction or the widely acknowledged health risks associated with cigarettes and nicotine. However, the reality is that the popularisation of vaping is similar to that of cigarettes in the 1920s. Originally seen as harmless, an unprecedented scale of promotion and advertising led to the now-understood devastating impacts on the health of millions of people around the world. Without intervention, vaping will similarly grow in popularity and wreak harmful effects on young people across Australia.

Investigations into e-cigarettes have found multitudes of negative health effects associated with the aerosols, chemical flavourings and nicotine content in vapes. One such study performed by the World Health Organisation linked vaping to increased risk of lung infections, heart disease, obstructive lung disease and asthma diagnoses. However, despite the negative consequences, vaping and the use of e-cigarettes is extremely prevalent, especially among youth.

Vaping is dangerous because of the nature of the substances used within them – they are largely, and in some cases completely, unknown by the public. Nicotine is a known drug of addiction which causes significant harm both physically and psychologically. The increased prevalence of vaping will result in an overwhelmed health care system, resulting in financial pressures to all Australians regardless of their vaping use. Many of the companies producing e-cigarettes are doing so under unregulated conditions, and without publication of the chemicals being used to create the compounds found in vapes. Being a relatively new craze, the risks associated with vaping are not fully understood as there is no long-term data to draw from. However, evidence of lung disease from ultrafine particles being inhaled directly into the lungs has already begun to surface. Additionally, a major health risk of e-cigarette use is the concentration of nicotine available within the e-liquid. Despite restrictions put in place over e-cigarettes, some commercial e-liquids have nicotine concentrations much higher than the legal limits, and others have misleading information produced by the company and others incorrect contents labels displayed on the e-cigarettes.

A survey conducted by the Alcohol and Drug Foundation identified that 20% of non-smokers and 64% of cigarette users have tried vaping. Of those people, 74% were encouraged by external influences such as social media to try vaping. Additionally, a study conducted at the University of Artervelde examined how college students were exposed to advertisements of e-cigarettes. The study showed that popular social media platforms were widely associated with the experimental and continual use of e-cigarettes and vaping.

In regard to the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth Poisons Standard states that nicotine is a classified Schedule 7 in dangerous poison along with arsenic and cyanides, suggesting nicotine is a deadly drug/poison and could be fatal if consumed in high quantities. This legislation was designed to highlight the dangers of the drug, inform members of the community of the danger associated with nicotine especially to youth, and to keep members of the community safe. The Queensland Act, Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act 1998, s5A, s26ZS states that e-cigarettes (regardless of whether they contain nicotine or not) cannot be consumed in no-smoking indoor and outdoor facilities, sold to children under 18 years of age, advertised, promoted, or displayed at retail outlet, or sold in vending machines, and if caught breaking these law heavy penalties may occur. This legislation was developed to protect members of the community from harmful second-hand smoke inhalation, reduce youth exposure to e-cigarettes, and allow individuals to make informed decisions and understand the consequences of their actions, thus aiming to reduce the popularity and societal pressures of e-cigarettes.

Moreover, the impacts of vaping are not limited to serious health risks and a rise in dangerous addictions among young people. Another factor to consider is the environmental impacts of e-cigarette use and the rising problem of waste management. Vaping creates a vast array of environmental concerns such as an increased use in single use plastics, increased plastic pollution and toxic waste being introduced to the environment when vapes are discarded.

In a time where the climate crisis should be at the forefront of legislative action, the environmental impacts of vaping cannot be overlooked. Action must be taken to minimise this concern such as enforcing instructions on the proper disposal of e-cigarettes. Without addressing this growing concern, the environmental impact will continue to worsen. Proper education into the responsible disposal of these devices is essential in minimising the impact before a more permanent solution in the reduction of vaping can be reached.

School Governance is the Australian school sector's leading news and information source. According to an article published by this source, strategies that have been implemented to decrease the use of e-cigarettes and increase student awareness of the risks, including through locker searches, education campaigns and the restriction of access and monitoring of bathrooms during lunch time. Throughout our search, there was no information to suggest any approaches are currently being taken to discourage the uptake of vaping. While schools are taking some measures to prevent vaping on campus, the statistics proving its prevalence in society suggest that these measures are not impacting the rate of young people vaping, and thus more needs to be done.

It is evident that social media has had, and continues to have, a significant impact on the recent popularity of vaping and e-cigarettes. Misinformation regarding vaping is rife over various social media platforms, with advertisements and content encouraging viewers to buy, use or sell vapes and e-cigarettes. A study investigating the relationship between social media portrayal and the sudden popularity of vaping found that "besides serving as a platform for e-cigarette advertisements, social media sites facilitate information sharing about e-cigarettes with images of their use among adolescents". Therefore, we believe that the most effective way to combat this rising issue is to utilise social media. Awareness and behaviour modifications takes time, however, to create change innovative but realistic techniques including social media support, real stories and campaigns will have to be developed and implemented to stop vaping being perceived as socially acceptable, trendy, fashionable and healthy.

Existing laws and regulations must be updated to enforce the display of graphic warnings on e-cigarette packages as well enforcing movies and TV shows and social media to display health warnings for vaping to highlight and bring awareness to the significance and life threatening risk associated with it. This will help to reduce the societal norm and pressures of e-cigarettes within the youth. The updated laws should

also dictate that media, influencers and recreational activities must disclose if they are receiving sponsorships from e-cigarette companies. Another technique would be providing community outreach services and counselling which would allow individuals to seek help, and reduce the prevalence of vaping. Increasing health campaigns within the community, including through posters on public transport, bathroom facilities, social media, and community groups, would also help to spread awareness resulting in a reduction of e-cigarettes within the community.

Our youth deserves transparency – to know to a full extent what exactly they are inhaling. To know the risks, and to know what has happened to those who were not warned, and ultimately, what could happen to them.

Thank you for considering our submission.

Kind Regards,

Bulimba Electorate Youth Advisory Panel 2023

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