

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

Submission No: 76
Submitted by: P&Cs Qld
Publication:
Attachments:
Submitter Comments:

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



WHO IS P&CS QLD?

P&Cs Qld is the peak body supporting, advocating for and representing more than 600,000 state school parents and wider school communities throughout Queensland. We support the achievement of quality educational outcomes for students through fostering parental and community engagement in a thriving and successful education system.

Through our state-wide network of 1262 P&C Associations, School Councils and some 44,000 plus volunteers, we have the localised presence and voice to lead and enact change to achieving our objective of giving every child every chance in education and life.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. The current status in Queensland relating to the:

a. prevalence of e-cigarette (vape) use, particularly among children and young people

P&Cs Qld estimates approximately 40 per cent of high school students have or are using vapes before, during and after school. This is a very alarming statistic and seems only possible with the widespread lack of parent awareness and understanding as to the contents of vapes. Many parents and carers believe vapes with flavours such as cotton candy, jellybeans, orange, grape etc are harmless to children.

b. risks of harmful chemicals in e-cigarettes, including nicotine, to individuals', communities, and the health system

The awareness of the risks associated with vaping are grossly lacking within parents and carers and more broadly across the community. The marketing of vaping portrays the products as harmless flavoured water vapour. Some products are disclosed to contain nicotine allowing some consumer choice to be made. However, we feel this incorrectly reinforces the perceived harmlessness of vapes that do not contain 'disclosed' nicotine.

As non-medical professionals, the comments we make on health impacts are based on research covered in the media and talking to the experts such as Lung Foundation Australia. We understand media-reported health ramifications to be extensive with some saying teenagers are permanently damaging their lungs to the point where lung function is comparative to geriatric adults. At the moment we understand little is known about the long-term effects of vaping on these young people. The assumed cost to community and health systems will be extensive.

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

P&Cs Qld have close involvement with Queensland state Schools and are confident in the measures being undertaken by school principals and leadership teams. The difficulty is that with parents and carers not understanding the ingredients of vapes, the chemical reactions occurring

within the vaporisation process and the damage being done to young lungs, parents/carers and schools are often clashing as to the enforcement and discipline of students undertaking vaping.

Some parents comment when advised of disciplinary action being taken involving their students “that at least they weren’t smoking”. These comments clearly articulate the severe lack in awareness of vaping contents, technology, availability, and prevalence within school cohorts.

A further concerning consideration as to the urgency of action required is the continuing lowering of student ages being observed vaping with schools to the point where it is no longer a secondary/high school issue but now extends to grades 5 and 6 in primary schools.

Anecdotal evidence also suggests some students are trading/selling vapes to other students within schools for profit with significant margin applied to each item sold.

A key concern is the perceived widespread easy availability and access of vapes to school students via other students, retailers who are failing to check ages and online overseas suppliers. In some cases, we understand some parents/carers are purchasing the products for their students with the widespread lack of awareness of the legalities of supply only to under 16 years old and the marketing of the vapes as harmless products for young people.

As to how to discourage the uptake and use of vaping, P&Cs Qld believe the same approach and techniques used to discourage and reduce smoking needs to be adopted and rolled out immediately. Vapes are trending at the present given their marketing (which is targeted to young people) is not counter balanced by evidence of the ingredients, dangers, and health consequences of vaping. Young people are being deceived by the marketing of vapes as harmless flavoured water vapour products. Some might stay away from the nicotine containing vapes but are still unaware of the actual ingredients in vapes. If informed early and appropriately we believe students have the common sense and decision-making capability to choose not to commence vaping in the first place.

Extensive investment is required to effectively communicate, educate, and raise awareness of the medically backed information on vaping and the consequences of trying and/or regularly using vapes. The anti-smoking campaigns took many years to have effect. Our message would be the sooner similar investment into anti-vaping campaigns is made the less damage to young people will occur. It is important to note that these suggested campaigns and actions must reach and educate parents/carers as well as students from senior primary school students and above years.

P&Cs Qld seeks to support all awareness campaigns being considered and undertaken through our network of P&Cs and parents and carer volunteers.

2 Opportunities to increase -

a. awareness of harmful effects of e-cigarettes use (with and without nicotine) to individual’s health and the effectiveness of preventative activities.

P&Cs Qld believes there is a drastic lack of awareness about the harmful effects of vaping across students and parents/carers. What is required is extensive fact-based campaigns that generate awareness and actively educate students, parents, and carers.

The same level of broad investment deployed during the heights of anti-smoking campaigning is required. We believe this would be an investment toward preventing the same legacy issues and impacts that smoking had on individuals, community, and health systems.

The marketing of vapes promotes a harmless water vapor product with flavours the appeal to children and young people. P&Cs Qld believe more is required to be done in policing the marketing, supply and retailing of vapes to school students. Tightening of strict controls of retailers selling vapes will make it significantly harder to access the products. The same controls,

consequences and enforcement of alcohol and normal cigarettes need to be enacted. Our fear is that any failure to act or delay to act will have significant cost to many young peoples' lives in the short, medium and long term.

b accessibility and effectiveness of services and programs to prevent uptake and continuing use of e-cigarettes.

P&Cs Qld believes firstly, there is a severe lack of awareness of many of the current services and programs targeting the prevention of uptake and use of vaping. More definitely needs to be done to engage at the broad community awareness level to promote these supports and activities. Secondly, in terms of the effectiveness of initiatives the target market needs to be children from 10 years of age upwards, parents and carers. Campaigns need to be hard-hitting, fact-based, and scare-focused to have impact. The lessons learnt from anti-smoking or drink driving campaigns need to be replicated.

3 Consideration of waste management and environmental impacts of e-cigarette products

P&Cs Qld are not informed or qualified enough to provide valued comment on this point other than to refer to similar ongoing impacts standard cigarettes waste management and environmental impacts have on waste levels, pollution, and environmental consequences.

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

While P&Cs Qld acknowledges our limitations, we do note that no level of jurisdiction, framework, policy or preventative activity will be effective or impactful, unless enforcement and compliance measures are applied at levels that effectively control accessibility and usage of vapes.

Tightening of accessibility to vaping products needs to be combined with significant awareness and education that tells the facts about the dangers associated with vaping to discourage students to try, and/or take up vaping in the first place.

Key Points/Recommendations:

1. P&Cs Qld suggests there is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to act to substantially influence students and parents/carers as to the impacts and consequences of vaping and if action is not taken now the impacts on individuals, communities and health systems will be exponentially greater.
2. General awareness and understanding of vape ingredients, practices and impacts is extremely limited and is heavily influenced by the marketing of the products as harmless flavoured water based vapes.
3. Significant investment (to the scale of the peak times of anti-smoking campaigns) is needed to effectively educate students, parents/carers and the wider community as to the facts of vaping.
4. The marketing of vaping suppliers needs to be tightly controlled to avoid targeting of young people.
5. Policing of retailers of vape products needs to be significantly increased to ensure products are only accessible for legitimate reasons and by appropriately aged clientele.
6. Increased promotion of current initiatives to stop children having access to e-cigarettes is drastically needed as there is little to no broader community awareness of them.

P&Cs Qld appreciates the opportunity to provide this submission on behalf of P&C members, volunteers and parents/carers of Queensland state schools.

P&CS QLD SUBMISSION

P&Cs Qld can make its resources available to support and assist any future Government campaigns or programs through our existing networks and connection with Queensland parents/carers and our P&C Associations.

Submission prepared by P&Cs Qld

Contact for further details:

Scott Wiseman - Chief Executive Officer

Ph. [REDACTED]

email [REDACTED]