



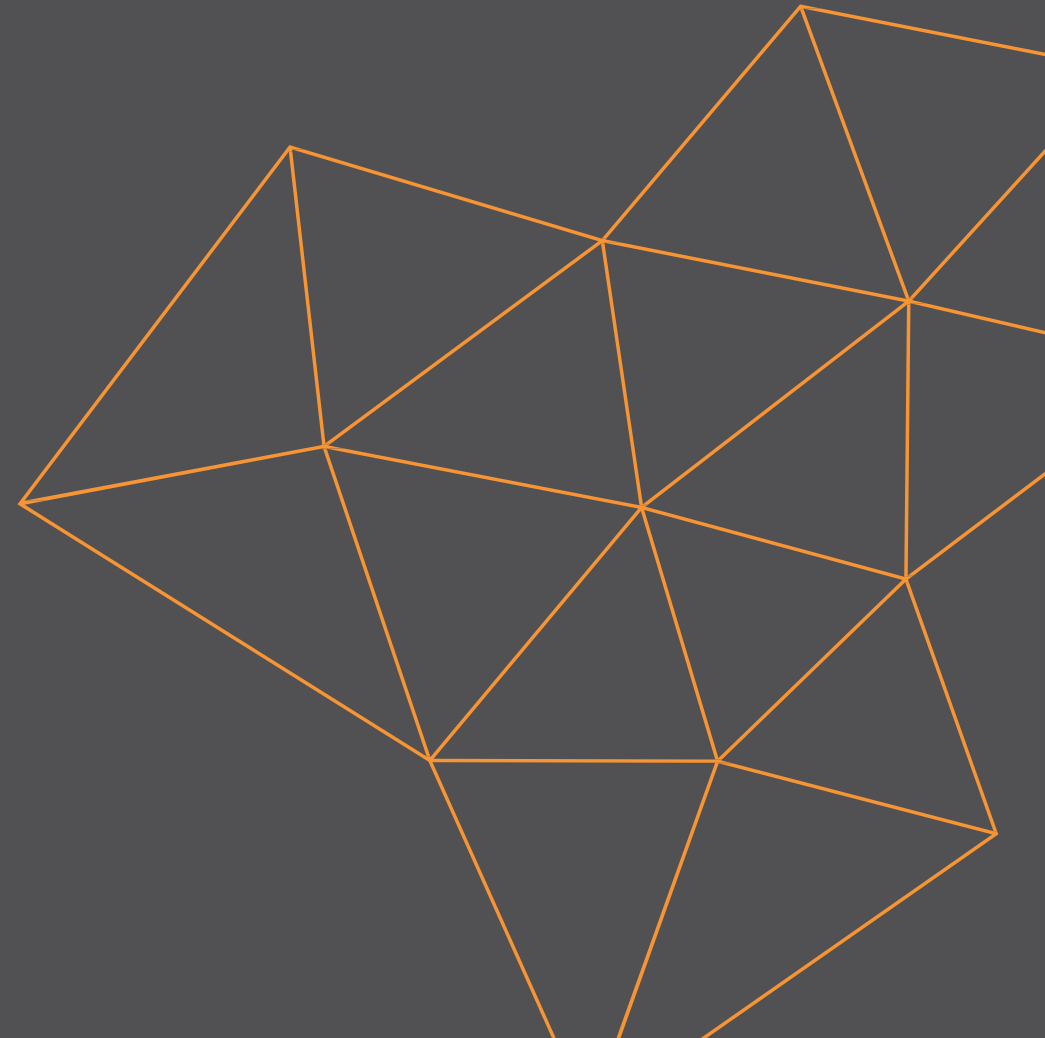
THE
**BEHAVIOUR
CHANGE**
COLLABORATIVE

Being Gen Vape

Exploratory research on the knowledge, perceptions, attitudes
and influences on teen vaping in Western Australia

Donna van Bueren, Luke van der Beeke, Allison Grainger, Raluca Petrut

JULY 2022



WHO ARE WE?

The Behaviour Change Collaborative (The BCC) is a values-based social enterprise that works collaboratively to influence behaviours and improve lives. We partner with government, academia and civil society to address health, social and environmental challenges. Our approach is multi-disciplinary and informed by a deep understanding of what moves and motivates those we seek to serve.

The BCC was established to deliver positive impact, and everyone at The BCC is passionate about making a positive difference in the world. We provide end-to-end behaviour change services, from formative research, program design and implementation, to evaluation and capacity building.

Services are delivered in Australia and overseas and we proudly only undertake work that seeks to deliver positive impacts for people and our planet. We generate revenue to fund service delivery. Any profits generated by operating activities are invested in for-purpose initiatives.

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This work was undertaken to support growing efforts to address teen vaping. Feel free to utilise, share and build upon this work noting the suggested citation above. Copies of the report can be found at www.thebcc.org.au.

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A MESSAGE FROM THE BCC



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Director, Behavioural Insight



Luke van der Beeke
Founder & Managing Director



Allison Grainger
Strategic Insights Lead

On behalf of The Behaviour Change Collaborative (The BCC) we are pleased to provide this deep dive into teenagers and vaping. We hope that it can be a significant contribution to the shared understanding of this emerging and concerning public health issue.

Over the past few years, The BCC has grown increasingly concerned about the rapidly rising visibility of youth vaping. There appeared to be insufficient insight as to how and why vaping appeared to be escalating in prevalence, and how to prevent further take-up. Big questions emerged: Is vaping as big a problem as school teachers, some parents and teenagers themselves suggest? What motivates and enables teens to vape, given vapes are illegal and unsafe? How should adults talk to teenagers about vaping – what don't we understand? What behaviour change interventions are needed?

With the support of Healthway, we've undertaken deep dive exploratory research with teenagers in school years 7 to 12. More than 90 teenagers took part in two iterative stages of qualitative research, conducted over three months during March and May 2022.

The teens we spoke to have shared what it's like to be *Gen Vape* – their opinions, their feelings, their hearts and minds. Their words tell a powerful story of what it's like to be in a world where vaping has quickly become widespread and is perceived as normal. The honesty and candour with which they spoke was at times disarming and distressing, and at other times reassuring and encouraging. This report provides a synthesis of what we've learned.

Importantly, the voice of teenagers runs through our findings unfiltered. A supporting document, *Being Gen Vape – Implications for Intervention Design*, is available upon request.

Welcome to the world of *Gen Vape*.

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Executive summary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Two iterative stages of exploratory intervention research with 92 Western Australian teenagers in school years 7 to 12 was undertaken between March and May 2022. The project's aim was to provide understanding of teen vaping behaviour, informed through lived experience. We explored teenagers' knowledge, perceptions, beliefs and attitudes, and the interpersonal and contextual influences on vaping amongst this young cohort whom we refer to as *Gen Vape*.

A behavioural picture of vaping

Teenagers who vape think that vaping is roughly twice as prevalent compared to teenagers who don't vape. Much of this belief is shaped by what teenagers observe and hear at school, as well as in their social circles outside of school. When it comes to vaping, it is difficult to separate these two contexts as social groups at school and outside of school overlap, both physically (in person) and via social media.

The notion that vaping is bound up in identity or stereotypes is rejected by teenagers – vaping is seen as something teenagers 'do', it is not who they 'are' or wish to 'be'. Nonetheless, when pressed many teenagers cast vaping in a negative rather than positive light.

Youth involvement with vaping is not as clear-cut as grouping teenagers into those who vape, and those who don't. Vaping use falls along a continuum, from having not tried it and having no desire to do so, to those who are dependent on the product. Age has a bearing on vaping behaviour, but is not the determining or predictive factor because vaping has 'landed' on all age groups at roughly the same time. Within families, siblings of mixed ages may be vaping.



Disposable vapes are most common as they are easy to get and cheaper than refillable vapes. Older teens might buy vapes directly from retailers (in person from convenience stores, delis, and barbers or online) and have rarely, if ever, been asked for ID. Social media trading via 'drops' is common, mostly via Snapchat and Instagram and to a lesser extent Facebook. Older friends and siblings are also common ways to source vapes and the opportunistic use of parents' own vapes also occurs.

Most teenagers were socially introduced to vaping – their first experience usually occurred in school bathrooms, at parties and friends' houses. The sharing of a vape is a large part of the appeal and the rewarding experience of vaping (sharing vapes is considered normal and omnipresent).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Knowledge and perceptions

Teens who vape are more knowledgeable about vapes generally than those who do not vape; and age and gender have little bearing on knowledge. All teenagers know that vaping is ‘bad for you’, and that it can become addictive if they don’t manage how much and how often they vape. They know that nicotine is the ingredient in vapes linked to addiction, but in the main they don’t know the nicotine concentration of their vapes nor are they particularly interested. They know that vapes contain chemicals but they have only superficial knowledge of what chemicals, or how they can be harmful. Similarly, teenagers are superficially aware that vaping can cause long- and short-term harm to their health but they are not convinced of the immediacy, severity and personal susceptibility of the health consequences.

The appeal and experience of vaping is perceived to be very different to smoking. Vapes are perceived to be less harmful than cigarettes, but just as addictive and much more appealing. In comparison to cigarettes and other drugs, vaping carries less stigma and is more socially acceptable. The age of take-up for vaping is considered to be much younger than cigarettes, alcohol and other drugs. Teenagers are curious about the cigarette equivalency of vaping, but have no idea how to calculate it. Translating vape consumption into cigarette consumption has potential for deterring teenagers from vaping because the case for cigarette harm is well established.

Beliefs and attitudes, barriers and facilitators

For teenagers who vape, the perceived benefits far outweigh the costs. The benefits include social enablement, enjoyment, escapism and fun. There is a universal understanding amongst teenagers who vape that the core benefits of vaping are the nicotine ‘hit’ and the flavourings. Vaping without nicotine or flavour is considered ‘pointless’ however if they had to choose, most would choose nicotine over flavour. A fear of addiction, health harms and friendship problems are the reinforcing influences on teens who don’t vape. However, many teenagers who do not consider themselves to be addicted to vaping believe they can mitigate their susceptibility to costs and harm by limiting their vape use (number of occasions, number of puffs, or continue sharing with others rather than owning their own vape).

Cognitive dissonance currently supports vaping. Teens who vape reconcile, consciously or sub-consciously, their decision to vape with a belief that vaping is ‘not so bad’ (as cigarettes, drugs and self-harm behaviours) . This enables them to adjust their behaviour (vaping) to their beliefs, rather than the other way around.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Teenagers are conditioned to rely on health warnings and ingredient labelling as a signal for safety (or perhaps conversely as a signal for danger). The absence of both on vape packaging and the device itself inadvertently suggests to them that vapes are safe ‘enough’, or at least enables them to rationalise that they are. The absence of a clear danger signal is another contributor to the maintenance of cognitive dissonance in favour of continuing to vape, rather than stopping.

The affordability and easy access of vapes are also significant enablers of vape use amongst teenagers. Vapes are considered very easy to access (“*as easy as finding a pen on the floor*”) and price is not a barrier to use – particularly when so much vaping involves shared vapes, and particularly amongst teenagers who have casual jobs. Most teenagers who vape regularly wish they hadn’t started, wish it was harder to find vapes, and wish that it was more expensive.

Self-efficacy (to not vape)

The perceived ubiquity of vaping – at school, in social groups, and at parties and public places – along with the addiction of nicotine erodes self-efficacy to stop. The proposition of saying ‘no’ in group settings is viewed as ‘too hard’, and even if they wanted to stop, the appealing smell of those vaping around them makes it too difficult. Not vaping is viewed as easier on weekends than during the week, without the facilitating nature of the school setting – in terms of the access and the opportunity it affords, as well as the unintentionally coercive impact of the group vaping context.

Whose opinion matters?

Not surprisingly, when it comes to vaping a teenager’s own opinion matters most; however trusted adults’ opinions also matter to many – parents, sports coaches, health professionals (a doctor and the school nurse) and close family members. For teens who don’t vape or vape very little, it is the ‘cost’ of their parents’ disappointment that they most wish to avoid.

Implications for messaging

The three ‘consequence’ themes of chemicals, health harms and nicotine addiction, when put together have the potential to build a credible and arresting narrative of why vaping is ‘bad for you’. Messaging around vaping industry control and manipulation, and a moral or values-based argument for not vaping, is more problematic. There are lessons and insights for how messaging can be executed more impactfully and effectively. Education approaches thus far have failed to trigger personal susceptibility, perceived severity or urgency.

Background, objectives and methodology

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES



BACKGROUND

Creating a smoke-free WA is one of Healthway's five strategic priorities, and children and young people are a priority population group.

Concern about the perceived increasing prevalence of vaping among young people and the potential short- and long-term health implications, has led Healthway to fund The BCC to undertake an intervention development project to better understand vaping amongst WA teenagers.

This exploratory project will inform the future design and piloting of targeted interventions, including communications, for one or more priority cohorts with respect to vape use by school students.



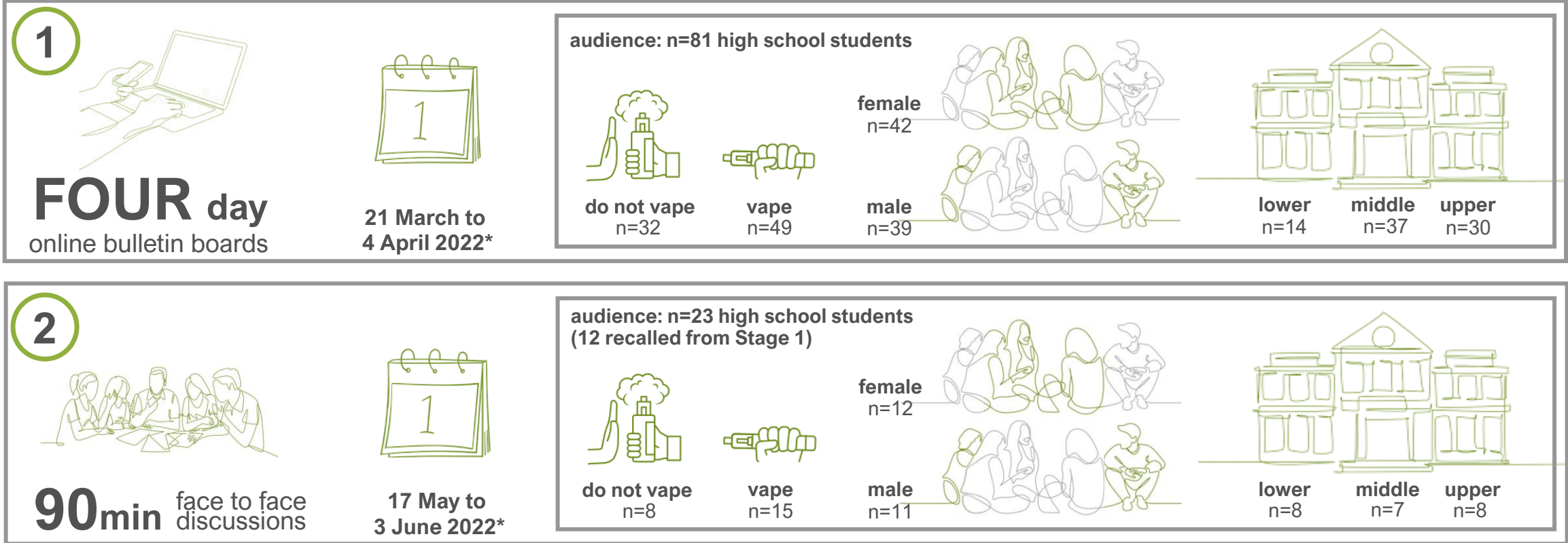
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The project had two over-arching aims, with several sub-objectives:

1. To explore, understand and describe:
 - a qualitative behavioural picture of vaping (past and current use, future intentions, frequency and quantity, access and supply, nicotine content and type).
 - knowledge and perceptions of vaping - positive vs negative, content/ingredients, concerns, and perceived harm of vaping (and compared to tobacco).
 - beliefs and attitudes - perceived barriers and facilitators to vaping and not vaping, costs vs benefits; self-efficacy to avoid or stop vaping, and influence of stereotypes and the role of identity.
 - social contexts for use and non-use – both interpersonal, transactional and settings-based contexts.
2. Identify if and how the above factors influence different cohorts, what mix of social marketing methods will have the greatest impact on vaping behaviour, and what communications approach and message territories will be most effective.

METHODOLOGY

The research comprised of two iterative qualitative stages: online bulletin boards and face to face group discussions. A total of n=92 teenagers took part in the research, aged 12-18 years (school years 7-12).



*The research was conducted prior to the launch on 19 June 2022 of the Western Australian Government’s action plan to tackle vaping amongst teenagers and school-aged students.

METHODOLOGY

... the detail



ONLINE BULLETIN BOARDS – STAGE 1

The online boards were programmed and hosted on the platform Digital Diaries. The boards ran over three consecutive days for teenagers who do not vape and over four days for teenagers who vape (including a weekend behavioural assignment).

The structure of the board comprised questions, activities and open discussions. The tasks and activities presented to participants deliberately utilised an open, unstructured style of questions, with follow up prompts and probes. The lines of inquiry utilised projective framing techniques, indirect questioning and statement-response formats.

The weekend behavioural assignment was designed only for teenagers who vape, asking them to abstain from vaping until the following Monday, when they returned to the online board to share their experiences of how they went, and to enable the researchers to better understand the influences on the self-efficacy of not vaping.

The bulletin boards with teens who do not vape were conducted first, to build the understanding of knowledge, beliefs and attitudes to vaping, to become familiar with teens' language around vaping, and to identify topics and lines of inquiry that required exploration in greater depth with teens that vape.

The online boards were used to understand vaping behaviour (patterns of use, access and supply, context) and undertake an exhaustive diagnosis of influence on vaping (knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, facilitators and barriers).

Online boards were selected for several reasons:

1. To include a **larger sample size of participants** across the desired range of strata variables than could be achieved via traditional focus groups (i.e. year group, gender and vaping status)
2. To **capitalise on the privacy and anonymity** that online discussions afford, which produced rich, honest and highly personal information because participants were disclosing their views in a safe and anonymous setting
3. To allow participants **time to reflect** on the topics and engage with the content in detail and at their own pace. This resulted in highly thoughtful and considered responses from participants
4. To protect the fieldwork from disruption due to Covid-19

The behavioural assignment component was included to dig deeper into self-efficacy with respect to not vaping, and ground the findings in recent lived experience (of trying to not vape), rather than supposition.

METHODOLOGY

... the detail



ONLINE BULLETIN BOARDS – STAGE 1 (cont.)

RECRUITMENT AND SAMPLE STRATIFICATION: A total of n=83 participants were recruited to fulfill three main stratification criteria:

- **Year groups:** Lower (years 7/8), middle (years 9/10) and upper high school (years 11/12). Years 9/10 were over-represented in the sample to account for presumed vaping prevalence amongst this cohort
- **Current vaping status:** vape and do not vape (including those who have tried vaping or vaped in the past)
- **Gender:** the sample was designed to give equal representation of males and females
- Some **geographical representation:** n=12 teenagers living in regional WA

PARENT CONSENT: Parent consent was sought and received at the recruitment stage, and again from parents of those teenagers participating in the social media (Snapchat) element of the behavioural assignment.

INCENTIVES: Teenagers were incentivised \$90 for completion of the three-day bulletin board and \$120 for four days.



FACE TO FACE DISCUSSIONS – STAGE 2

Face to face discussions were used for the second stage of the research to explore the effectiveness of messaging themes that emerged from the bulletin boards. The stimulus used in stage two was informed by an environmental scan of teen anti-vaping campaigns in Australia and the United States.

RECRUITMENT: A total of n=23 teenagers participated in the face to face discussions, n=12 of whom took part in Stage 1. Eleven teenagers were newly recruited, to enable the inclusion of two cohorts under-represented in Stage 1:

- an additional n=3 year 8 males who vape
- an additional n=8 participants who do not vape, but are at risk of doing so

PARENT CONSENT: Only teenagers who expressed interest and received parental consent for the second stage were included in the research. A total of n=12 teenagers participated in both research stages.

INCENTIVES: Teenagers who participated in the second stage of research were incentivised \$90.

The *Gen Vape* world

THE *GEN VAPE* WORLD IN A NUTSHELL

The world asks a lot of teenagers; they face pressures from school, home and friendship groups. They're expected to do well in school, to fit in, to make good choices, to be independent – even when home life might be troublesome, even when their mental health is suffering, even when friendships dissolve and support dwindles.

Teenagers have a lot on, and most are doing their best and yet feel unheard and misunderstood.

Some teenagers vape to escape their problems for a bit, others feel pressured to vape to fit into social groups. Some vape to relax and unwind. Others vape to experiment or rebel. Vaping feels safer than drinking, smoking cigarettes or marijuana or using other drugs. For a smaller number, vaping is a substitute for self-harm, to escape pain, and as such it is felt to be their least harmful option, sometimes even the responsible one. A few vape to keep hunger at bay.

Most teenagers started vaping in a social setting, typically with friends, where vapes were passed around. Some felt pressured to try, while others were simply curious about the flavours and the tricks. Even when teenagers say they do not feel pressured, the environment and context itself is pressure enough. The perceived ubiquity of vaping is keenly felt.

Not all teens who do not want to vape are able to say no, especially in group settings. Others invent reasons why they can't vape – asthma, training for a sports event, etc. Sometimes teenagers who say no are excluded from the social group or gatherings. At times this is only temporary, but sometimes it is permanent, reinforcing the perceived risk of saying no.

Most teenagers know that vaping is 'bad for you'. They are aware of the link between nicotine and addiction and are broadly but only superficially aware of most health risks. They don't understand the health harms, or choose not to.

Some teens would vape anyway, even if they understood the full extent of the harms and consequences, as they tend to engage in risky behaviours and it's part of their personality. For others, the health risks are ignored or discounted as they only plan to vape for a short time, not long enough to experience serious harm.

Teenagers are generally accepting of people who vape, and although they do not tend to label them, there is some stigma associated with vaping. As vaping has increased in popularity over the last couple of years, it is becoming more acceptable, normalised and ubiquitous – something many teenagers just 'do'. Vaping is not who they 'are', and they reject any suggestion otherwise. Vaping has gone from being counter-cultural to mainstream – no longer worthy of comment or criticism.

While teenagers have been educated and convinced of the risks of smoking they find it hard to link an innocuous, pretty, sweet-tasting vape with similar harms to smoking a stinky, burning cigarette.

Damage to health is a major driver of the decision not to vape, or an intention to quit. Cost is another.

Many teenagers who vape intend or want to quit and bemoan or despair at their addiction. They harbour regrets for having started vaping, and wish it was easier to stop. Many recount how they are on their last vape (again), and are discouraging others from starting.

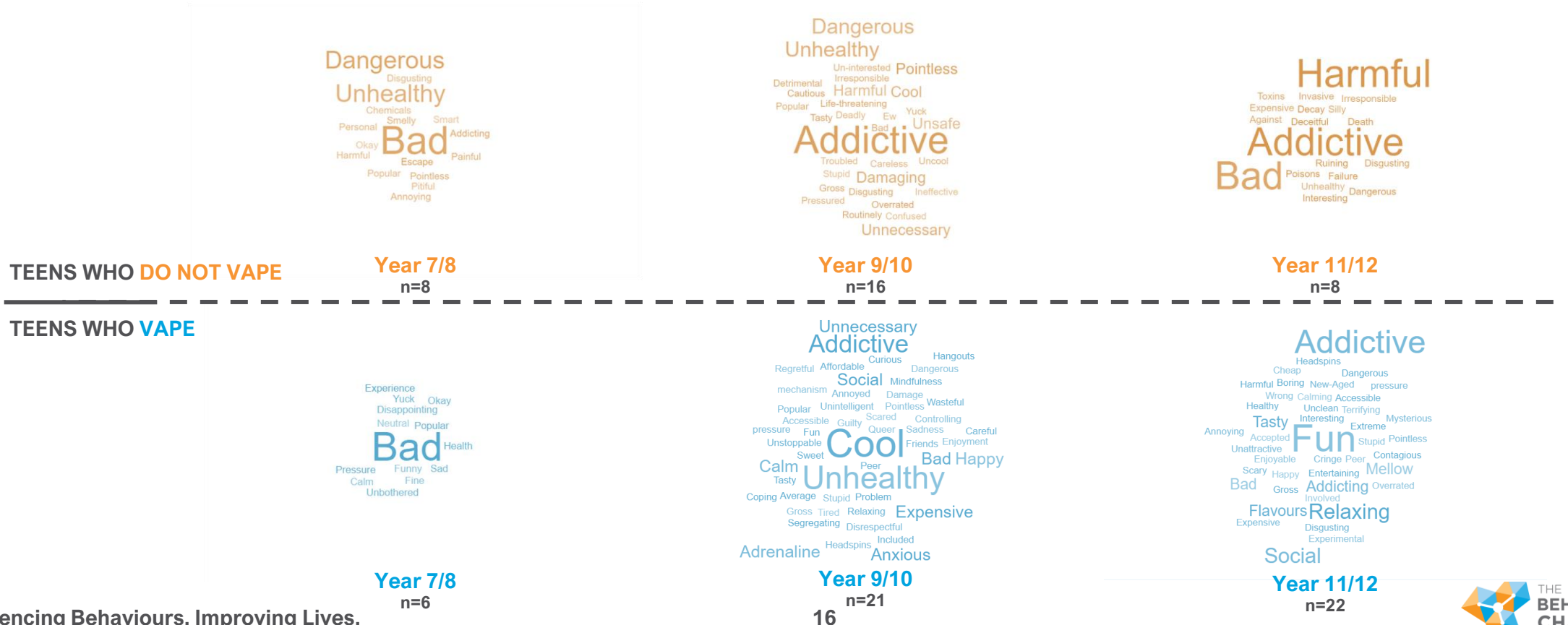
Those who vape less frequently often do so to avoid addiction, and/or save money. They intend to stop 'down the track', and expect it will be easy since they only vape occasionally and therefore aren't addicted. Teens who vape occasionally or opportunistically don't see vaping as a cause for concern as they are not addicted.

Many teens talked about quitting 'soon' – in the next year or two, but definitely by their 20s. Vaping has quickly become aligned with the teen life stage – becoming the new teen rite of passage and a safer alternative to other illicit behaviours. However, vaping is seen as inconsistent with becoming older, getting a job (not a good look), or having kids (not a good example).

Welcome to the world of *Gen Vape*!

HOW I FEEL ABOUT VAPING

Teenagers were asked to describe how they feel about vaping using three words. The word clouds below provide an indication of the most salient word associations. **Amongst teenagers who do not vape, the word associations are almost exclusively negative**, with ‘addictive’, ‘harmful’, ‘unhealthy’ and ‘dangerous’ dominating the discourse across all three age cohorts, with ‘addictive’ increasing in salience in the older age groups. **For teenagers who vape, the word clouds become increasingly balanced in positive and negative sentiment as the cohorts age** – with ‘cool’, ‘fun’ and ‘relaxing’ being equally as dominant in the middle and upper years as ‘addictive’ and ‘unhealthy’. The word ‘addictive’ does not feature in the word associations of teens until the middle high school years.



We asked teenagers to choose, from a range of photos, an image that they felt best represented how they felt about vaping and then to discuss their choice. Two images stood out ...

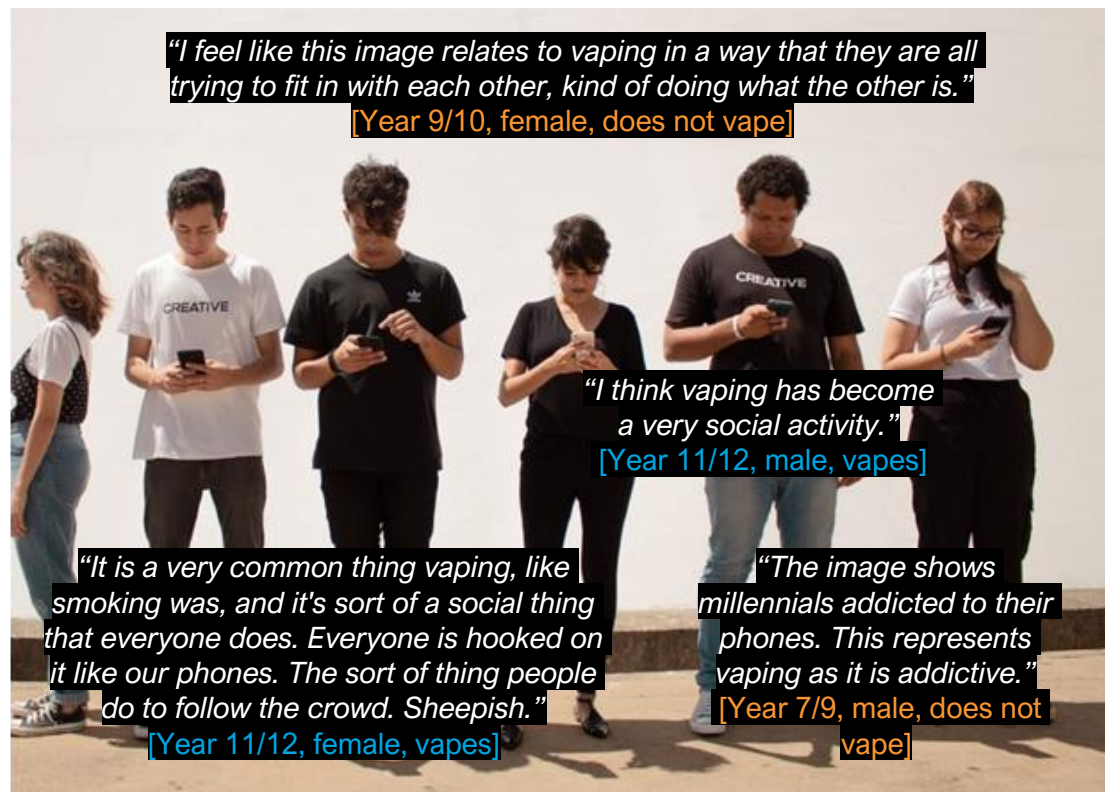
1. Vaping is associated with social acceptance, wanting to fit in, a way to connect and peer pressure.



“I chose this photo because most people are doing the same thing, copying each other by going on their phones. It reminds me of my friends all vaping because most other people do it. The girl that is facing away reminds me of my hesitant friends who won’t vape, and they prefer to not vape even if everyone else is doing it.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

“It is like peer pressure and addictive because you want to do the same thing as your friends and not feel left out, while also understanding that it’s wrong and can be dangerous and potentially cause you harm when you’re older.”

[Year 9/10, male, does not vape]



“Vapes end up in your pocket. My brain has never gone quicker to buying a smoking product after the vape runs out of battery. They are highly addictive and can be used as constantly as iPhones today.”
[Year 11/12, male, vapes]

“I think vaping is a teenage trend that people do to look cool and to be occupied with something other than their phones. People also often do it in groups so it is a way to connect with others, even if they know they shouldn’t.”
[Year 11/12, female, does not vape]

“I feel like vaping separates the majority of people from the people who vape. Most people who aren’t subject to vaping are usually pretty against it.”
[Year 9/10, male, vapes]

We asked teenagers to choose, from a range of photos, an image that they felt best represented how they felt about vaping and then to discuss their choice. Two images stood out ...

2. Vaping is associated with addiction and struggling.

““

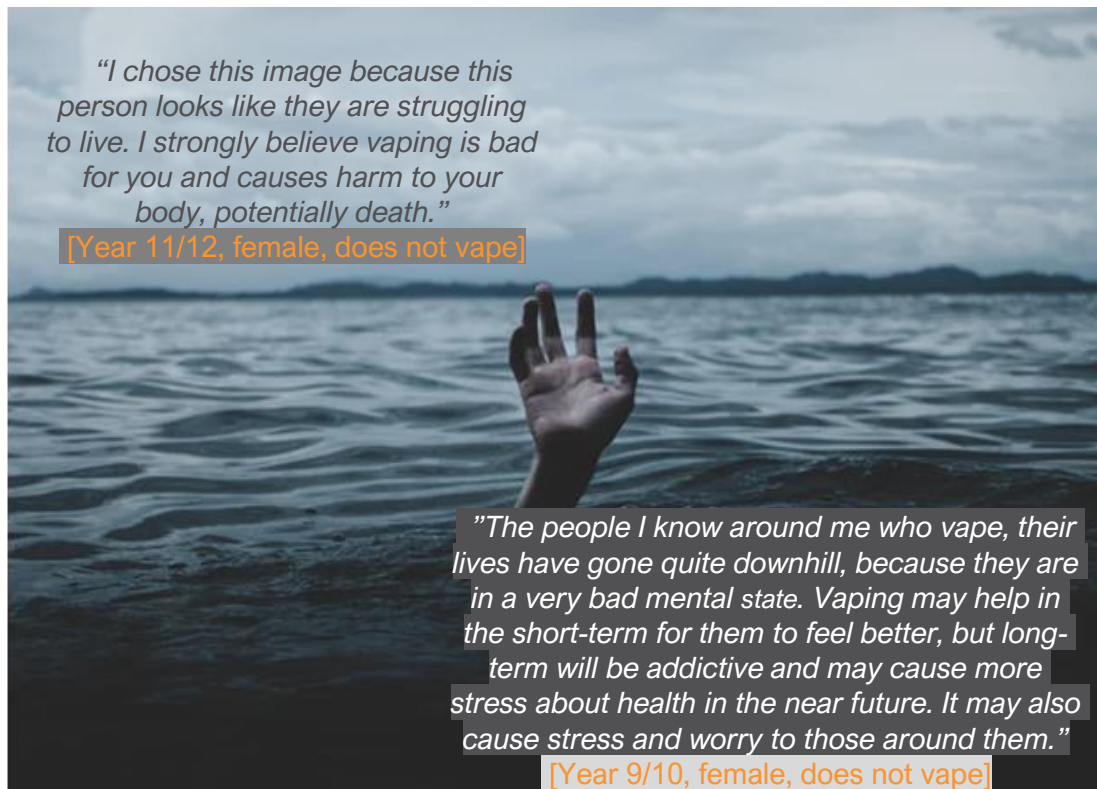
“I chose this image because vaping ruins people’s lives.”
[Year 9/10, male, vapes]

“It represents what happens once you are addicted, because you can’t get yourself out. It’s like you’re stuck.”

[Year 7/8, female, does not vape]

“I know what it’s doing to my health, but I can’t stop.”
[Year 9/10, male, vapes]

“I feel it is a trap because it contains a highly addictive drug, and as much as people would like to get out of the habit, they can’t.”
[Year 11/12, male, vapes]



“People who vape typically get addicted and find it hard to find a way out. This image personifies that, showing a person drowning, waving out a hand, desperate for help. I believe vaping leads young people into a dark place, where it gets hard to get out of. Young people like us find it hard to get out of things like vaping, especially since our friends and the people around us are doing it.”
[Year 9/10, female, does not vape]



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Teenagers who vape think that vaping is roughly twice as prevalent, compared to those who do not vape.

“But then I feel like in the younger years, from year 8 to 11, I would say it’s 60%.”
[Year 11/12, male, vapes]

“In my year, maybe 10% or 15% who are constantly doing it. But every single time I walk into a toilet, there is just someone from a younger year, always, they’re constantly in there. When you walk into a toilet it’s never free. There are always people vaping in there, year 8s and 9s.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

“It wasn’t a trend. Now it is.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

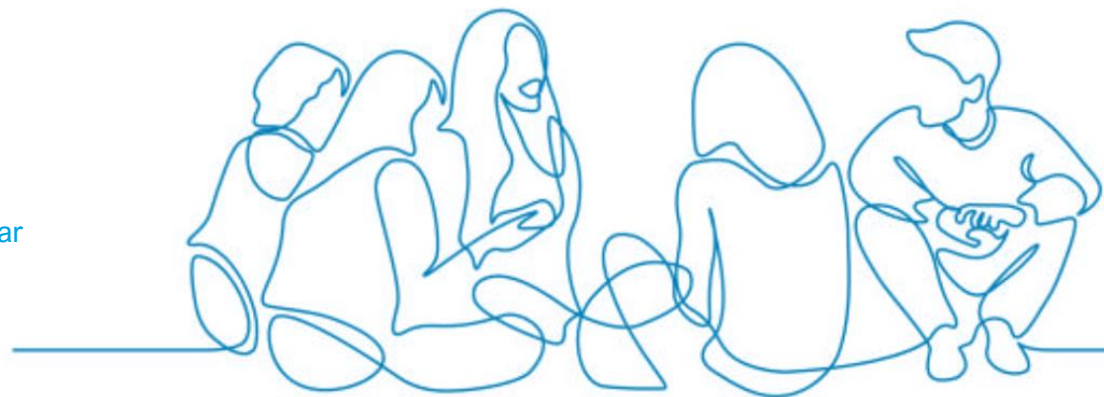
“A lot of people I know, their parents buy it for them.” [Year 7/8, female, does not vape]

“Teachers come in at lunch and recess but can’t catch you if you’re in a stall.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

“My brother vapes. My mum vapes. My dad vapes.”
“They’re easy to get.” [Year 7/8, male, vapes]

“My mum gave up on me at this point.” *“Not hard to do a sneaky.”* [Year 7/8, male, vapes]

“I vape often. Mum doesn’t care.” *“It’s hard to quit if everyone has them.”* [Year 7/8, male, vapes]



TEENS WERE ASKED TO TELL US WHAT ADULTS DON'T GET ABOUT VAPING

Adults do not understand the pressures teenagers are under and that they are struggling to cope, nor do they understand the perceived ubiquity of vaping and how addictive vaping is.



YES, VAPING IS NOT SOMETHING TEENAGERS SHOULD BE DOING BUT MY QUESTION FOR ADULTS IS 'DO YOU KNOW WHY YOUR CHILD IS VAPING?' MANY TEENAGERS HAVE A LOT TO DEAL WITH SUCH AS SCHOOL, FAMILY AND MAYBE WORK, ETC. ADULTS NEED TO UNDERSTAND THAT FOR MOST TEENAGERS IT'S AN ESCAPE FROM REALITY AND MAYBE THEY JUST WANT TO HAVE FUN AND LIVE LIFE TO THE FULLEST.

Year 7/8, female, does not vape

Adults do not understand that...

... Teenagers want freedom to make their own decisions and for their parents to trust them. For the most part, teenagers want to do the right thing and make responsible choices. They are also curious and push boundaries and may do things they regret. It is all part of growing up.

... Some teenagers use vaping to rebel, some are just curious and tempted by the flavours. Some vape socially for enjoyment but also to fit in.

... Teenagers may use vaping as a calming and coping mechanism to escape reality and the problems they face. Vaping makes teenagers feel better.

... Vapes are so easily and readily accessible and vaping is more and more popular and normalised.

... Vaping is highly addictive. Once you start it is not always easy to stop. Some find it impossible.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"Adults don't understand how easy it is for young people our age to fall into traps like this, such as vaping. When everyone around you is doing something, as an adolescent, you're inclined to join in, you want to feel included and part of a group. Adults will tell you to not get involved with 'bad influences' yet fail to understand how easy it is in our society to get involved with such people, and how sometimes it is difficult to realise that they are 'bad influences', as they may be someone you're very close to." [Year 9/10, female, does not vape]

"Adults don't get that it can be a helpful way to sort out our problems as teenagers. I know that vaping is dangerous but sometimes you just get the urge to do it and you just do it. It can just be a fun thing that you do with friends. School or work can be a very hard part in life for teenagers and vaping can just get your mind off of everything. I guess you can say that it can clear your head for a short period of time." [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

"It is hard to not want to try it at least once and that it's not always easy to stop there." [Year 11/12, male, does not vape]

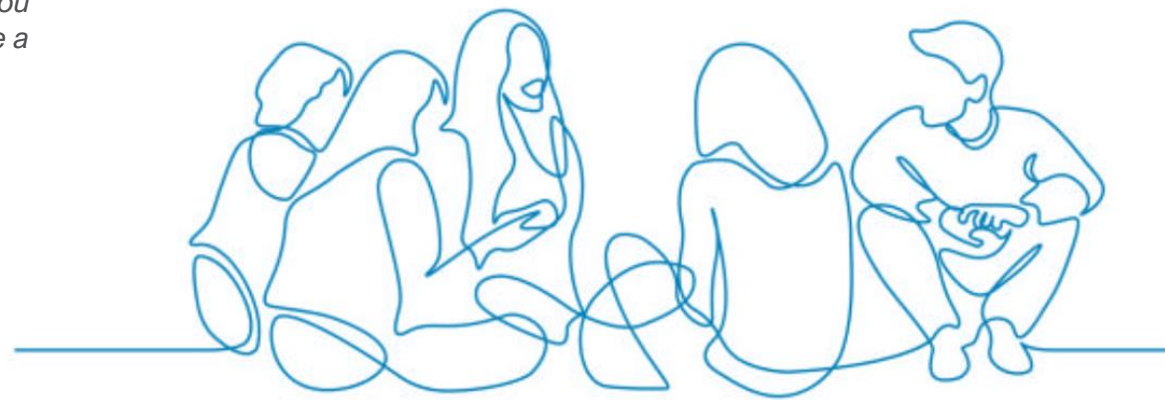
"That being able to buy vapes is as easy as finding a pen on the floor at school." [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

"It makes us feel calm. It sort of gives us a small high where we can just chill out by ourself or with our friends and forget about school and responsibilities for a few seconds. Most teenagers, including me, do it because to us it's harmless compared to smoking weed and it also makes us fit in." [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

"Everyone thinks it's cool and gets you to try it, and if you don't, they try to bully you." [Year 7/8, male, does not vape]

"Most adults think of it as teens trying to be cool, what they don't realise is that this is a highly addictive substance and most of the time teens aren't proud of it." [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

"That it's hard not to use or try them as everyone around you is using them." [Year 9/10, male, vapes]





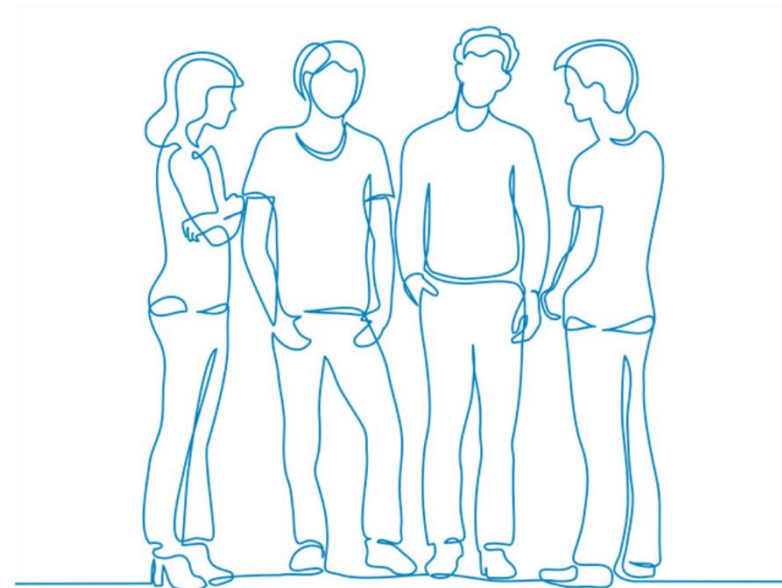
IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"Adults don't get the fact that when it all starts, we don't think it will become an addiction. We think it's a harmless product that really isn't as bad or even close to as bad as cigarettes are. So we keep doing it, wasting our money on it, and buying them. We buy them because it makes us feel good. When I say feel good, I mean the feeling of a new flavour or the way of how the strength of the smoke is when it goes into your throat, its almost a relieving feeling. That's what adults don't get, the fact that it can be addictive just like adults with cigarettes." [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

"I think that adults don't get the amount of stress us kids go through, so we turn to vaping and drinking alcohol, doing drugs just to relieve the stress. I think people get peer pressured into doing these types of acts because they don't want to be left out or made fun of for not being 'cool'. Adults don't get the amount of pressure we're under whether it's to do with school, family, friends or partners. They also don't get that it can get addictive really fast and it's hard to give it up. I know most adults do go through the same thing but it's harder for kids since some of us get pressured into doing it." [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

"Adults don't get that if you don't try vaping it will limit your social status because people are judging you." [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

"That kids might be stressed and they might want to vape to relax." [Year 7/8, male, vapes]

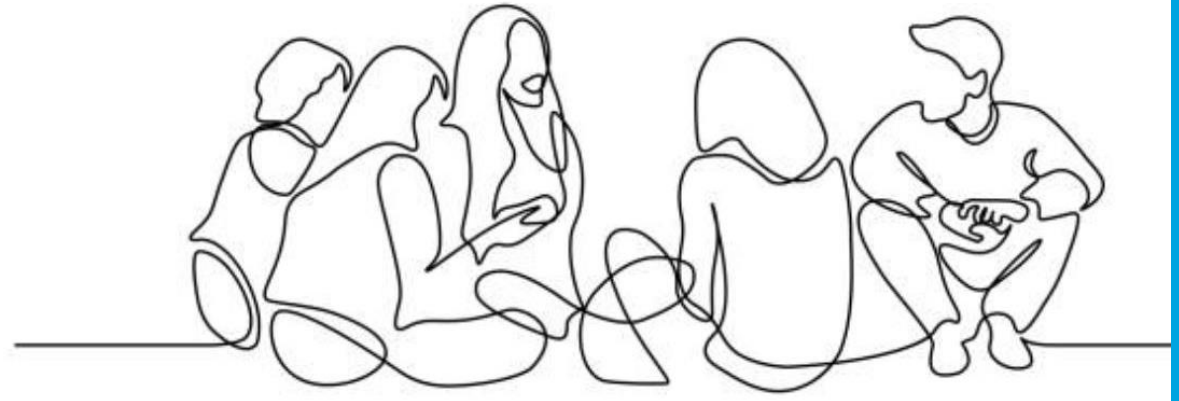


"Adults don't get that us teenagers know that it isn't beneficial for our lungs and our health, but we do it anyway. My friends and I aren't that bad, we all have our own nicstick and sometimes we get together to blow O's and make tricks, but I personally feel nothing if I go a whole week without hitting it, no withdrawals." [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

"Adults don't get what it feels like when almost everyone in your friend group vapes everyday. They don't understand how exposed I am to vaping, so they expect it to be easy to stay away from it. People always tell me to try it and they might think I'm the odd one out for not saying yes to vaping, so I do it". [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

IDENTITY – VAPING IS SOMETHING TEENAGERS DO. IT IS NOT WHO THEY ARE

While teenagers do not like to assign labels, those who do not vape view teens who vape in a slightly negative light.



NO, I WOULDN'T IDENTIFY FRIENDS WHO VAPE IN A POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE WAY – I JUDGE PEOPLE BASED ON THEIR PERSONALITY AND HOW THEY TREAT OTHERS. I DON'T REALLY CARE WHETHER OR NOT SOMEONE VAPES AND DON'T JUDGE THEM FOR IT.

Year 11/12, female, vapes

Vaping may be part of someone's identity, but it does not define them. Teenagers who vape do not self-identify as 'vapers'. It is something they do, not who they are. Teenagers may assign a vaping label to a social group, rather than to an individual.

Teenagers who do not vape occasionally identify others based on their vaping behaviour. This tends to happen if the behaviour is visible and

frequent. The distinction is made between teenagers who vape because they are curious and those who vape because they are addicted to vaping.

Sometimes it is not the behaviour that forms part of their identity, but rather their personality. Teenagers who vape can be seen as breaking rules, taking risks, not caring about their health, less interested in school and less concerned with consequences. Sometimes the consequences of vaping (being expelled from school) contribute to negative labelling more so than the behaviour itself.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“When I think of them [people who vape], I think of their personalities. Vaping is a social activity for them, but I think one is getting addicted or relying on the feeling. Vaping is a small part of their identity, and they don't really flaunt it.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

“Someone who doesn't vape might be ‘the soccer guy’, but someone who does vape might be ‘the vaper’.” [Year 7/8, male, does not vape]

“I would personally never label it as a negative thing, because I feel like that is unnecessarily rude and could be harmful to them, but I also do not think about it in a positive light.” [Year 11/12, female, does not vape]

“Yes. It is something you think of when someone brings up their name, like ‘oh yeah, the person who vapes’. It is a pretty big part of their identity and that is the main thing they are known by.” [Year 11/12, male, does not vape]

“No way, you should never judge someone before you actually get to know them. Just because they vape doesn't mean they're a bad person. You don't know their story or why they vape, so vaping definitely doesn't label a person in any way.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

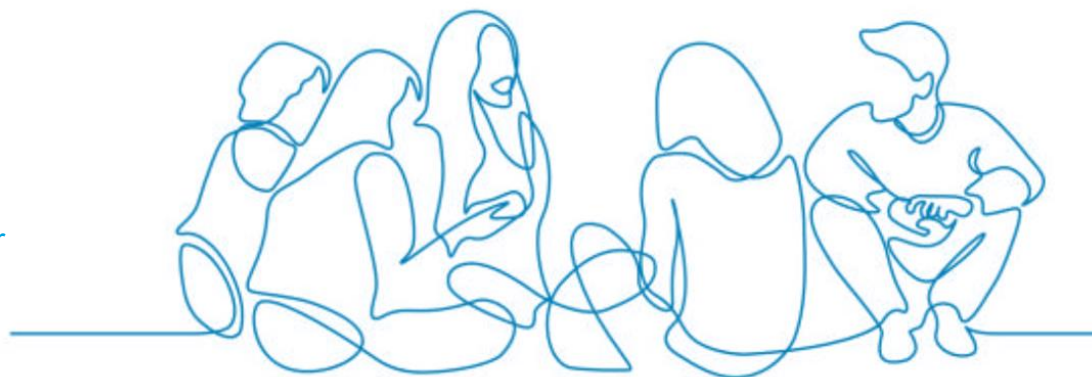
“So many people are vaping nowadays so it's sort of become normal. People aren't really identified as people who vape because that could be anyone.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

“Vaping used to be ‘cool’ but now I think it has just become a casual thing. Everyone is just addicted and now seeing the impacts, so I don't see it as a big part in anyone's personality and if they do, then they have bigger problems. No one advertises the fact that they vape. Some people you don't even know vape and they will just whip out a vape from nowhere.” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

“Being represented as ‘the guy who vapes’ is very negative. The last thing somebody wants to be known as is someone who vapes.” [Year 7/8, male, vapes]

“If someone had been expelled for vaping at school then that would identify them, but if nothing had happened to them because of vaping then it wouldn't be a way to identify them.” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

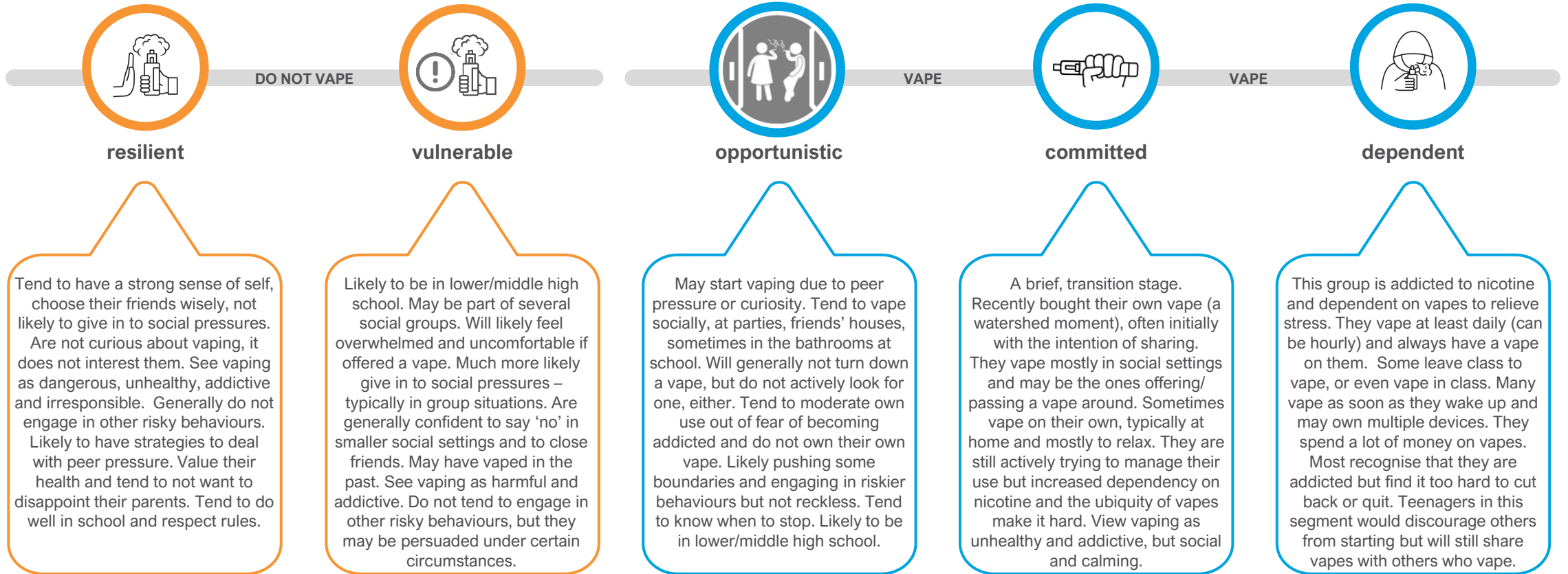
“Vaping is often associated as a way to negatively label teens, but it shouldn't be used to judge people.” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]



A picture of teen vaping behaviour

A QUALITATIVE SEGMENTATION OF TEENAGERS AND VAPING

Youth involvement with vaping is not as clear-cut as grouping teens into those who vape, and those who don't. Vaping use falls along a continuum, from having not tried it and having no desire to do so to those who are dependent on the product. Age has a bearing on vaping behaviour, but is not the determining or predictive factor because vaping has 'landed' on all age groups at roughly the same time.





I VAPE VERY OFTEN. AT SCHOOL, MOSTLY. IF I DON'T HAVE MY OWN VAPE, I DON'T NEED TO WORRY BECAUSE EVERYONE ELSE HAS ONE, SO IF I REALLY WAS FEINING, I WOULD JUST GO INTO THE TOILET.

Year 7/8, male, vapes

DISPOSABLE VAPES ARE MOST COMMON

They are easy to get, easier to take care of and cheaper than refillable vapes.

WHAT: Most teenagers vape with disposable vapes (“dispos”) containing nicotine that come in a variety of ‘tasty’ flavours including peach ice, mango, strawberry, lush ice, watermelon, pink iced tea and even Red Bull. Disposable vapes with nicotine are easiest to source and less expensive compared to nicotine-free disposables and refillable vapes. Only a few use refillable vapes.

Most common brands are IGET and Gunnpod. Rick and Morty was also mentioned, but brand does not seem important.

WHERE FROM: Teenagers can readily and easily purchase vapes from many sources. Older teens might buy direct from retailers, either local or online, and teens of all ages buy from someone they know or through social media meetups. When buying through retail, teenagers tend to purchase under-the-counter from delis, convenience stores and, for boys, local barber shops. These kinds of sellers do not ask for age ID and go to lengths to avoid detection (instructing students not to come in school uniform, for example).

Purchases from vape shops are rare, However, some older teens report not getting asked for ID when buying nicotine disposables from vape shops. Some teenagers purchase online (not all websites verify age) for personal use and/or resale.

Older friends and siblings are common sources, as are friends of friends. Parents or family members are occasionally cited as purchasing vapes for their teenagers but examples of parent-supplied vapes are mostly opportunistic – taking a hit or two of their parent’s (or grandparent’s) vape when they are not looking.

Social media deal meetups are very common. Suppliers (tend to be teens or young adults) will post on their social media (Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook) that they have vapes available and which flavours. Prices range from \$25 – \$45, depending on the size of the vape (number of puffs). Teenagers will typically meet the seller in a public place (train station, carpark, shopping centre) or charge an additional fee of \$5 – \$10 for a ‘drop’. Telegram is a well-known app that connects buyers with suppliers.

WITH WHOM: Most teenagers prefer to vape with other teens in a social setting. Occasionally teenagers will vape with family (a cousin or older sibling) and rarely in front of parents. Vaping alone is a sign of addiction.

WHERE: Teenagers in lower high school tend to vape in hidden places away from adults, but upper high schoolers vape more openly. Common places include the school’s toilets or change rooms, public communal spaces in shopping centres, parks, or at the train or bus stations and at parties, or in hidden public spaces in alleyways, behind buildings.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“Get them how you get any drug in Perth, it's just about knowing the correct people. Smoke shops sell vapes but at an extremely high price, when you can get them illegally, dropped to your door from a mate you would see sometimes daily because of how strong the addiction is. A lot of my friends are very rich from selling these things at double the price than retail bulk. Nicotine liquid is now the hardest part to get in vapes, that's why these illegal disposables have taken over the market completely.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

“People buy them online, get someone older to supply them, and then they are sold throughout high schools.” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

“Myself and my friends buy vapes off a bunch of people that sell them, or you can buy them online. And yes, some vape products are easier to get your hands on, but there a couple of people that only sell to people that are over the age of 18.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

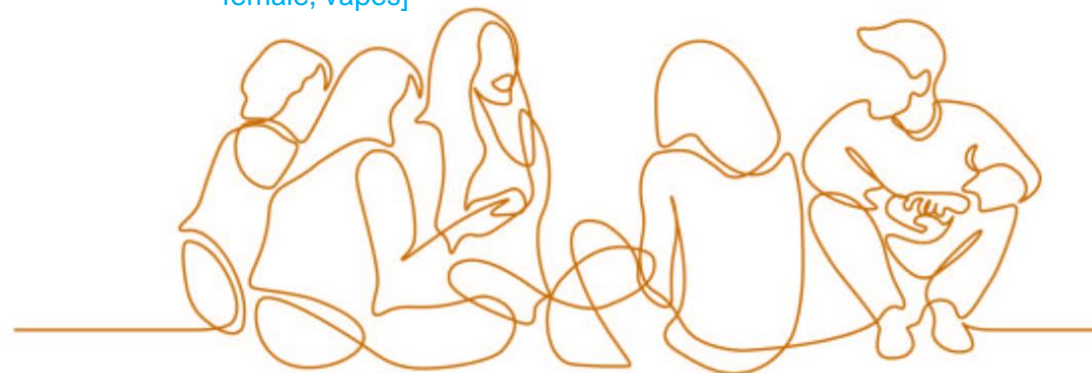
“There is a deli that sells them to adults, and they are insanely lenient about selling to teenagers. That is common knowledge at my school. You always see on your [social media] story people advertising them as shipments they just got in. And you also often hear about shipments being stopped recently, but some people still manage to sell them. Usually just on Snapchat. You could pay in cash when someone drops it to you or transfer it.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

“Buy them online, get them shipped to you, sell to the community, make money back, repeat.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

“Lots of people at school can buy them and lots of people advertise selling vapes on their Snapchat stories. We get the money from the money we make from work and disposable vapes are easier to get than mod vapes.” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

“IGETs are the easiest vapes to get at the moment, because that's the main one people are selling. Mostly boys aged 15 – 19 are selling them to high school students through Snapchat, by posting them on their stories. Lots of people offer drops for \$5 but me and my friends usually meet the person at our local park. But it's always someone in our year group who we talk to on a weekly basis and see every day.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

“I've sourced most of mine through friends who buy in bulk online. IGETs are normally common in Perth whereas down south GunnPods are more common – they are the two main vape brands. Very occasionally, I will go with friends who buy them from little shops, but I only really buy them off my friends. They can range from \$25 – \$40, and I pay for them with my own money by transferring funds.” [Year 11/12, female, vapes]



THE FIRST OPPORTUNITY TO VAPE WAS EXCITING FOR SOME

Others found it overwhelming.

Most teenagers were socially introduced to vaping and were not curious to try on their own.

A close friendship is not a pre-requisite to be offered the opportunity to try vaping – school acquaintances feature as well as close friends and to a lesser extent family (older siblings or cousins). Only a few teens mentioned that they bought their own vape for their first time, either to try on their own or with a close friend.

Sharing a vape is considered normative behaviour. Most of those who vape will share with others as it is ‘a nice thing to do’, never intended as pressure to vape. However, some of those who do not vape do see it as an offer to buy their silence.

Some teenagers felt pressured to vape, but the majority said that they did not. For the majority, the pressure is implicit and inadvertent – the result of being in the environment, wanting to fit in or avoid feeling left out.



SHE OFFERED TO EVERYONE THAT WAS THERE BECAUSE SHE IS A NICE PERSON.

Year 9/10, female, vapes

I THOUGHT, THIS IS FINE, IT'S JUST ONE PUFF AND EVERYONE IS DOING IT.

Year 9/10, male, vapes

WHERE: Teenagers most commonly tried vaping in school bathrooms, at parties, at friends' houses and in public communal spaces (shopping centres, parks, bus stops).

THINKING/FEELING: Teenagers experienced mixed emotions when offered a vape for the first time. Those who were curious about vaping felt excited, a bit worried that parents would find out, but also a little nervous knowing it is not good for them. Those who were curious about vaping and tried it, seemed to enjoy it. Some continued to vape and are now addicted to vaping.

Those who did not plan to vape felt nervous or overwhelmed. For some it was easy to say no and move on. For others it was uncomfortable but they managed to stick to their decision. Others gave in and felt guilty.

Saying 'no' is not always easy and does not always come out as 'no, thanks'. Saying 'no' can sometimes take the form of an excuse: 'I don't like that flavour', 'I compete in high levels of sport and my performance would be affected', or 'I have asthma and can't have a try otherwise I will have an asthma attack'.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The rush of vaping for the first time

“I felt good after it, as I got a strong head spin, but I didn't understand how people could get addicted.” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

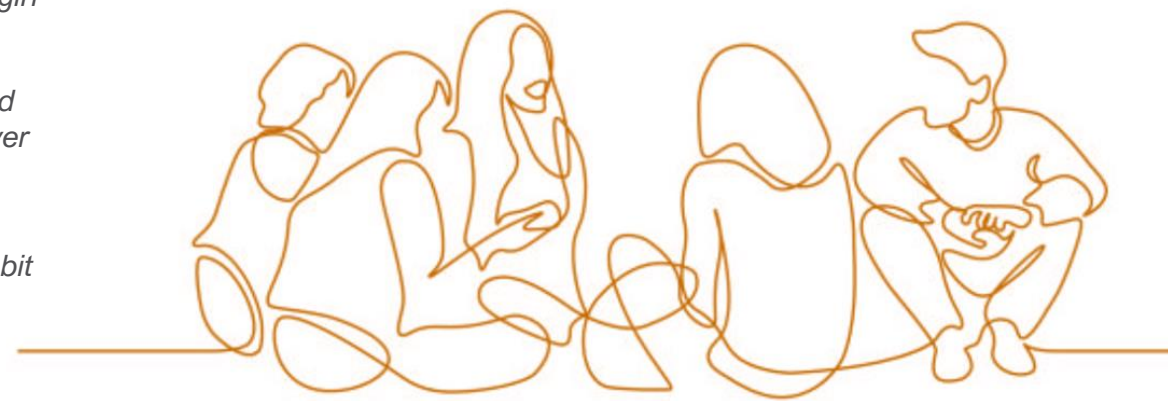
“I was with my mates in a park after school and they were vaping. I said ‘can I have a go?’. It felt great at first and I just thought ‘yeah, this is pretty neat’.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

“The first time I vaped I was with two of my friends. Me and one of my mates rode down to the IGA to meet up with another one of my mates because we knew this girl would have a vape. Once we got there, I bought a drink then I tried some of her vape. It was a 1200 puff disposable vape, blueberry ice flavoured. I immediately knew that I liked it and I had more and more. After I finished there, we rode around for a bit, then we went home. I felt like I had accomplished something new, however I was paranoid my mum would find out for the rest of the night.” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

“The first time I tried a nicotine vape it burned my throat and I coughed and felt a bit dizzy, but I liked the feeling.” [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

“I felt kind of happy if that makes sense, like grown up.” [Year 7/8, female, vapes]

“I got asked if I wanted to try and I said yes because I didn't think there was any harm in trying it once. I felt scared because I had never vaped before, and it was a scary thing because I'd only see adults do it. I felt shocked because the feeling of smoke coming out of my mouth was different. I didn't inhale the vape because I would've coughed. Then the girls asked if I liked it when I got back to class and I said yes.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]





IN THEIR OWN WORDS

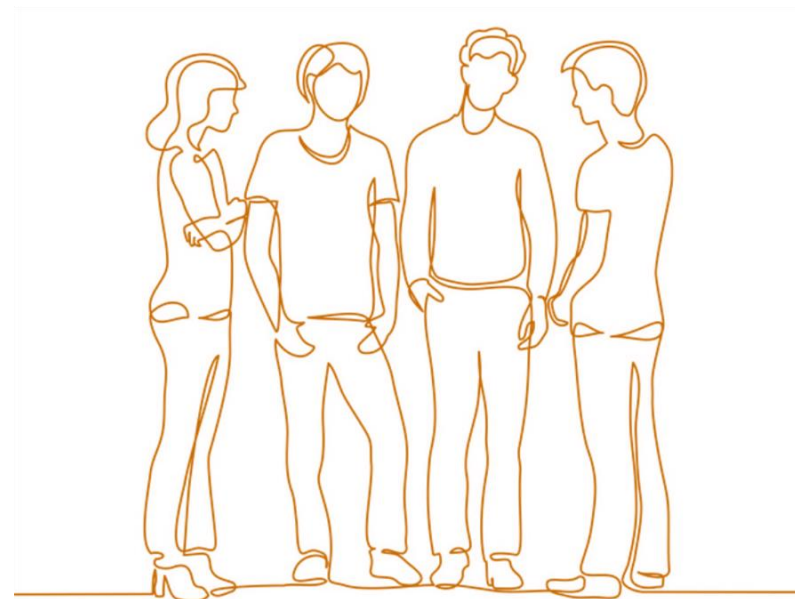
How quickly vaping can lead to addiction

“I felt very weird, didn't really think much about it and it just felt like flavoured air, but after a while it started to distract me and I was using it often. I was thinking it was pretty cool and thought it was tasty and fun.” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

“I bought a vape from a local deli with my best friend in the middle of last year. After I had my first puff of vape, I thought it was cool and loved the flavourings. Little did I know how much I relied on having a vape until I didn't have a vape on me and in my bag or even in my house” [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

“I was in year 8 or early year 9, I was in media class watching a movie with a couple of mates when one of my close mates offered me a puff and I said yes. I grabbed the vape and took a hit, it tasted like lollies and gave me a wonderful feeling. I just wanted that feeling more so I kept asking for some. This also led to me buying one from my close friend for years – the same flavour I originally tried.” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

“When he asked if I wanted a hit, I felt excited as I had seen many of my mates before this use their vape. When I hit it I didn't feel or think much about it, and I continued usually [sic] after it, having a few more hits throughout the day.” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]



“After I vaped, I coughed but I remember it tasted good and kept doing it because it looked cool. I was thinking that it wasn't bad for me at all and wouldn't have any impact on me at all.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

“Biggest spin out from nicotine I've ever had in my life. Brain's never gone faster back to any substance.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

“The first time I vaped was with a friend of mine who recently got on. I was in year 8 and he offered me a couple hits. At first, I was very uneasy about it, but I convinced myself 'you'll never know until you try it', so I tried it and instantly I felt the headrush from the nicotine. I was blown away and I wanted to continue using it.” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

First-time vaping is not always exciting

“If I wasn’t as confident as an individual, I may have fallen into the peer pressure trap.” [Year 7/8, female, does not vape]

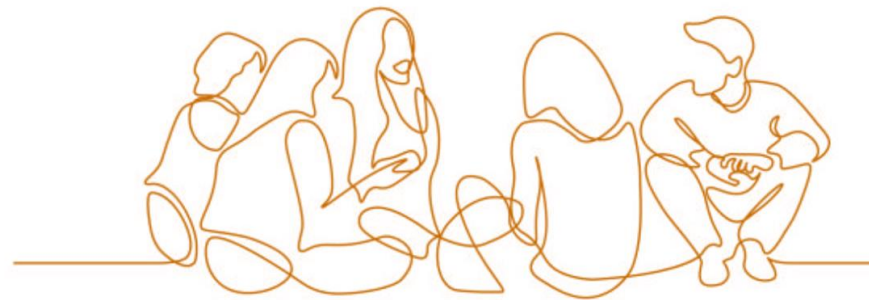
“Managing the situation sucks unless you have other people around you helping you out to not feel as pressured into doing such a thing. Luckily for me, all the times I’ve been offered a vape my best friend has been there and helped me and her get out of such a hard situation to get out of.” [Year 9/10, female, does not vape]

“I decided to try it and I was a bit nervous at first because I knew it wasn’t good for me, but I gave it a shot and felt fine after using it.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

“The vape was really strong so I think I might have coughed a couple of times. I was thinking ‘it isn’t that bad’ and I wanted to try it.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

“The first time I vaped was at a party. At first it was weird, and I coughed a bit but then I tried again and it tasted good, but it still felt weird like my throat was full of smoke and felt like I would choke at any second. After I felt fine, I got a bit dizzy when I stood up, but that wore off after a minute.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

“I felt cool and ‘accepted’.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]



“It hurt my throat and I coughed a bit, but I guess it was fun to do with friends.” [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

“I was with my friends in the school bathrooms, and they passed me the vape and my lungs felt like they burned, and I started coughing a lot. I wasn’t really thinking, I just did it for the fun.” [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

“I was at a party with a couple of friends at their house. I tried my friend’s vape for the first time, I felt the same as before I tried the vape, like I don’t really get how it’s addicting, all I see it as is just breathing in and blowing out smoke. I thought it was cool blowing out smoke, but I didn’t get any thrill or anything from doing it.” [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

“I was with my friends at school in the bathroom and one of them was vaping. They asked if I wanted to try theirs, so I agreed. After I vaped, I didn’t really feel anything and I didn’t see the point, but it tasted nice. I was thinking about why people spend money on these but also if I enjoyed it, but I came to the decision that it wasn’t really for me and I’d only do it rarely and wouldn’t buy my own.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

“One of them had a vape and started using it and she offered to everyone that was there because she’s a nice person and I tried it. I didn’t do it much at all but it tasted really nice and was satisfying to use.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

“I was with a girl I wanted to impress with my mates, and she had a vape. Coughed my lungs up. Felt stupid.” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Some felt remorse after vaping for the first time

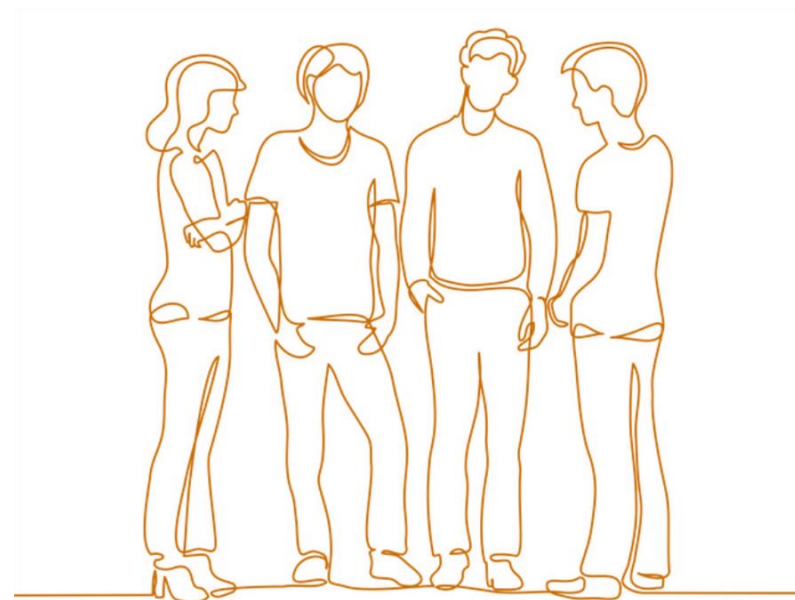
“I was in a car with one of my relative’s mates and he said ‘oi, have a hit’ so I did, and then I had a few more, then I didn’t really feel anything because I wasn’t breathing it in. I also thought to myself that I shouldn’t have done that.” [Year 7/8, male, vapes]

“After I vaped, I usually felt relaxed, and I was thinking that I shouldn’t vape.” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

“I felt guilty because it was illegal for my age and my parents didn’t even know.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

“One of my friends had already had the vape and asked me if I wanted to try it. I felt kind of guilty before I knew that you could damage your lungs from doing it. I wasn’t really thinking anything in particular, I just saw the vape and thought that we only live once, so why not.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

“I was with my friends, and we were at a party. Everyone around me was vaping and drinking so I felt obligated to. I felt guilty after as I know it’s bad and I know my mum wouldn’t be happy with me if she ever found out.” [Year 11/12, female, vapes]



SOCIAL MEDIA CREATES THE PERCEPTION OF UBIQUITY AND NORMALITY OF VAPING

It also plays a considerable role as facilitator in accessing and supplying vapes.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A FACILITATOR OF BEHAVIOUR

Most teenagers are exposed to vaping through social media; not through public posts, but via private stories.

Teenagers post images and videos of themselves (either alone or with friends), vaping and learning new tricks on their private account, which are seen only by their followers (or select followers). This positions vaping as desirable and creates the perception of ubiquity and normality.

Some teenagers may take up their friends' challenge of learning the tricks in an attempt to fit in or be more like them.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A FACILITATOR IN ACCESS AND SUPPLY

Social media, mostly Snapchat and Instagram and sometimes Facebook, facilitate access to and supply of vapes.

Purchasing a vape is easy. There is an established network of people (mostly teenagers) and accounts who post new shipments, with flavours, prices and drop or pick up options. The image to the right is an example of a Snapchat post.



IT WAS QUITE EASY TO FIND THE EXAMPLE IN MY SOCIAL MEDIA. ALL I DID WAS LOOK AT PEOPLE'S STORIES ON SNAPCHAT AND I CAME ACROSS A VIDEO OF SOMEONE UNDERAGE PICKING UP A VAPE SOMEONE HAD DROPPED OFF FOR THEM.

Year 11/12, female, does not vape



Knowledge: what teenagers know and don't know about vapes and vaping

TEENAGERS LACK KNOWLEDGE OF VAPING INGREDIENTS

Those who vape are more knowledgeable than those who do not. There was no obvious correlation of age with knowledge of ingredients and no obvious gender differences.

Teenagers who vape have mixed knowledge. A few know almost nothing. Most have a moderate level of general knowledge about how vapes work on a basic level and vague knowledge of key ingredients.

The ingredients most commonly known are nicotine, flavourings and generic mentions of 'chemicals'. Only a few mentioned battery acid and glycerol/glycol. Some mentioned the 'same chemicals as cigarettes'. Teenagers were surprised to find out that the vapour in vapes can contain heavy metals and the same chemicals found in nail polish remover and weed killer (less believable). All are regarded as scary ingredients, and new news.

Teenagers have a good understanding that vaping can be addictive and link it to nicotine. Most teenagers are unsure of what gives a vape its flavour, with most mentioning generic 'flavour chemicals' – the same found in 'lollies and chocolate'. They don't believe that the flavouring is harmless, but don't know how they might be harmful. Many felt that without the flavouring, teenagers would be less interested in trying vaping. Additionally, vapes without the flavouring and nicotine are regarded as pointless.

Some would be deterred from vaping if vapes were labelled with ingredients (chemicals), but they also need to understand how those chemicals cause harm. Unsurprisingly, ingredient labelling would be less of a deterrent for teenagers who seek out risk-taking behaviours.

Schools are a source of information with health, science or English classes and also presentations from guest speakers, although sometimes the knowledge does not stick. It goes 'in one ear and out the other'. However, guest speakers hold more credibility than teachers.



ONE OF THE SCIENCE OR CHEMISTRY TEACHERS SAT DOWN AND WENT THROUGH A BUNCH OF STUFF, AND MOST OF IT WENT IN ONE EAR AND OUT THE OTHER. BUT IT WAS UNPLEASANT – INDUSTRIAL CHEMICALS SORT OF THINGS.

Year 11/12, male, does not vape

I'VE HEARD THAT THEY ARE NOT CHEMICALS YOU WANT IN YOUR BODY.

Year 11/12, female, vapes



*IT CAN AFFECT YOUR ENTIRE PERSONALITY.
IT CAN AFFECT THE WAY YOU SLEEP, THE WAY YOU ARE IN GENERAL, IT CAN AFFECT YOUR EMOTIONS.*

IT'S NOT A GOOD THING.

Year 11/12, male, does not vape

TEENAGERS HAVE BEEN EDUCATED ON SMOKING HARMS AND LINK NICOTINE TO ADDICTION

They use 'vape' and 'nic' (nicotine) interchangeably and know that vaping is addictive.

Teenagers are aware that vapes contain various amounts of nicotine, and that 'nic-free' vapes should have zero nicotine. These are harder to get and more expensive, but more importantly they are less appealing. Vapes with 5% nicotine are most common. Most teens do not think about the amount of nicotine in their vape – and when asked, they feel 5% sounds safe.

Unless they vape to learn tricks and blow smoke, teenagers choose vapes with nicotine over 'nic-free' vapes every time. They choose it for the head spins, the hit, the rush. Nicotine makes them feel good. Five percent nicotine vapes are most common, and feel like a safe amount, but teens have little knowledge of what it actually means. Vapes with 1%, 2% or 10% are around, but rare. Teens are unaware of the equivalency of nicotine in vapes to that of cigarettes. Most were surprised and alarmed to learn that 'the nicotine in one vape can equal 50 cigarettes'.

Some teenagers consider themselves to be addicted to vaping. Addiction is mainly construed as high frequency of use. This varies in frequency (some daily, some hourly), but is commonly described as 'constant' use or need to use. Other common signs of addiction include always having a vape on them, spending a lot of money on vapes, leaving class to vape and replacing it as soon as it runs out.

Talking about the 'next hit', complaining and talking about vaping a lot, and asking friends 'do you have a vape?' are signs of addiction observed mostly in vaping social groups. Some emotional signs are present (mood swings, angry, agitated) but are mentioned less often. These can be overlooked as a sign of addiction as they are linked to mental health.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"I've heard about stuff like battery acid and paint thinner being in them but never actually done the research to find out what's in them. I know there is nicotine in most vapes and of course flavourings, but otherwise, I have no idea." [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

"I know that disposables contain nicotine and glycol but that's it, I have never read the packaging." [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

"I know there is nicotine in the vape juice, and when your vape starts to run out the coil burns which you can taste, which isn't pleasant." [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

"I don't really know what is in vape juice, I have never looked into it." [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

"From what I know, retail stock only has nicotine as I can't think of any other substances that would be in disposables or vape juice. However, these two can be laced with other things such as meth. Disposables also contain battery acid when you breathe it in." [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

"Nicotine and flavour. That's all I properly know, I haven't been given information on it." [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

"I have no clue what is in any sort of vape juice or disposables, all I know is that obviously it is not good or healthy." [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

"People who don't think they're addicted keep vaping because they think it's so easy to get out of, so they keep doing it [but] it's not that easy to quit." [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

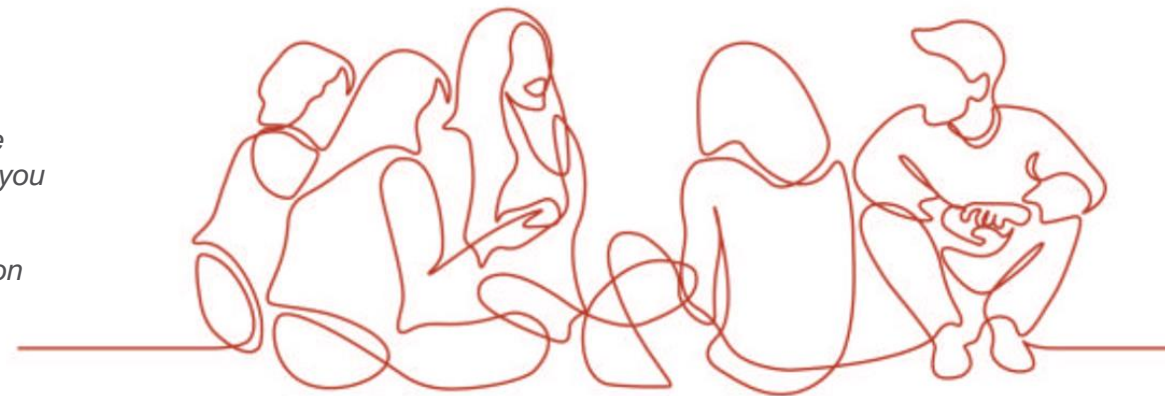
"Obsessed with it. It's a necessity." [Year 7/8, female, does not vape]

"I don't want to get to the addicted phase though, because then it's all the money and it's just bad for your brain, it shuts off your brain for a second. That's why I get the head spins." [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

"If you do it a lot then you're going to get addicted, but if you only do it just every now and then it's not that bad." [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

"I had a 4,000 puffs Rick and Morty. It died in two days." [Year 7/8, male, vapes]

"Vegetable glycerine, flavouring, battery, wire, cotton, coil." [Year 11/12, male, vapes]





*IT WOULD BE REALLY BAD
IF YOU GOT TO THE
ADDICTION POINT,
BECAUSE THEN YOU'RE
CONSTANTLY PUTTING
VAPOUR IN YOUR LUNGS,
AND TO ME, THAT JUST
SOUNDS LIKE YOU'RE
DROWNING YOUR LUNGS,
WHICH IS BAD.*

Year 9/10, female, vapes

TEENAGERS KNOW VAPING IS 'BAD FOR YOU'

They are aware of lung damage, generic harms to health, addiction and some mental health impacts. None of this knowledge is sufficiently understood or threatening to be a deterrent.

Vaping is not considered harmless. Short-term impacts are better understood and more visible, and although long-term consequences are scarier, some teens feel invincible.

Known short-term harms include shortness of breath, coughing, lung damage, nausea, dizziness and overall impact on fitness levels. Interaction with asthma was commonly mentioned.

Long-term risks include cancer, lung damage, addiction and mental health problems. Strong links were made between vaping and harms to lungs, including cancer. This is attributed to the physiological mechanism of breathing in vapour.

Teenagers are quite knowledgeable about addiction, but the extent of their understanding about their predilection for addiction is low. Some long-term harms are attributed to addiction and sustained use.

There was some awareness of neurodevelopmental vulnerability and the potential negative effects of vaping on cognition and long-term health and wellbeing. Teenagers have baseline knowledge of brain development and impacts from alcohol and drug education in schools, and while some can link vaping to brain harm, they do not understand how vaping changes the brain.

While some teenagers are aware of the impact of vaping on mental health, others find it hard to link or find it inconsistent with their experience. Teenagers experience poor mental health for a variety of reasons and it may not necessarily be due to their vaping. Many claim that vaping helps them manage poor mental health.

The link between vaping and heart damage is not common knowledge. Few lacked knowledge of the link between vaping and cancer and the impacts of nicotine. Some were aware that vaping is 'bad for you' in general without any specific knowledge of the harms. Cost and impact on relationships were mentioned as non-health related harms.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"I don't want to grow up and be 30 – 40 years old with lung cancer or popcorn lungs." [Year 7/8, female, vapes]

"If I'm not around people with vapes, then I'm just going to get myself one, and just keep buying one. I would quit. It's just that... am I going to quit to smoke cigarettes or am I going to smoke cigarettes and vape?" [Year 7/8, female, vapes]

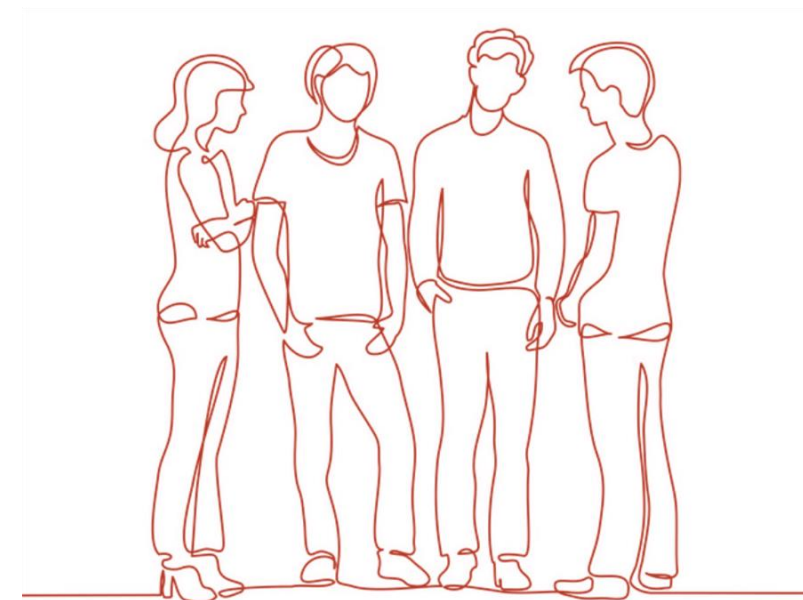
"Long-term effects of vaping sound scarier than the short-term impacts." [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

"[Short-term is scarier] because I think of my lungs short-term because I'm an athlete, and I don't care that much about my future." [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

"People will sacrifice their mental health and mood. I wouldn't sacrifice my lungs for a vape." [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

On brain development: *"They need to say that more, though. Everyone just assumes it's a younger age because you can start drinking when you're 18, but then it affects your brain until you're 25." [Year 9/10, female, vapes]*

On brain development: *"That's why they don't recommend drugs or alcohol." [Year 11/12, male, does not vape]*



TEENAGERS UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT OF VAPING INDUSTRY MANIPULATION AND CONTROL BUT DO NOT WISH TO BUY INTO THIS ARGUMENT

The concept is abstract. Industry is too far removed for them to acknowledge or cede 'control' to it. However, teens do judge the industry more harshly for a lack of transparency regarding ingredients and harm.



HOW IS THAT EVEN POSSIBLE? HOW IS THAT ALLOWED? YOU HAVE AN UNWAVERING FAITH IN THE GOVERNMENT TO PROTECT YOU FROM THOSE SORTS OF THINGS. AND IF THAT'S STILL HAPPENING, HOW IS IT HAPPENING?

Year 11/12, male, vapes

It is not easy to grasp that the vaping industry controls teenagers through a product specifically designed for them through packaging, flavours and ingredients – a product that is addictive.

Control, when it comes to vaping, is attributed to nicotine addiction, or to the social context/social pressure or benefits that it brings. Teenagers reject the notion that it is the manufacturer or the vape product controlling them.

Conversely, when pointed out to teenagers, vaping industry deception through the failure to disclose and label ingredients is considered highly objectionable.

Young people have been conditioned to trust ingredient labels and health warnings (like they see on cigarette packaging) and to believe what is on the packaging. They assume that the absence of a health warning on vapes is a signal that the product is safe 'enough' (not 100% safe)

but in contrast to cigarette packaging, certainly much safer than tobacco.

Most teens had never thought about the fact that vapes are not ingredient/content labelled. This was a new and uncomfortable fact and made them question what is in them. Most felt concerned at the lack of transparency by vape companies, but also at the lack of government regulation of vape labelling.

Teenagers struggled to reconcile that vapes are illegal and thus unregulated. A few thought that accurate labels and health warnings might prevent some teens from taking up vaping in the first place.

“

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“People like having control of their own actions. When you’re being told that you don’t have as much control you lose a sense of yourself. There’s a very big difference saying you’ve lost yourself and you lose a sense of yourself. When you lose a sense of yourself it means you need help. That’s a big difference.” [Year 11/12, male, does not vape]

“Consequences, especially ones that are as abstract as that... why would I even care about the idea of a company using me to make money? It feels further removed from the person.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

“If you can get a 14 – 15-year-old addicted to nicotine, you can have a permanent customer. If you’re selling products with nicotine in it, you’ve just built yourself a little money-maker for the next 60 years.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

“Scary that no one is monitoring. I feel like since they have to put the ingredients on the food that we consume, they should have to put it on vapes as well.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

“Even if they are trying to deceive us or take advantage of us, we still get the benefit of feeling good from vaping. It’s not a one-way relationship.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]



“I’d say companies throw vapes out at teens and then they’re left to deal with it. They have to go back to satisfy the addiction they’ve developed.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

“I just want to send people to investigate vape manufacturers.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

“I hate tobacco companies. The only reason they use this [vape] is because that’s going to be attractive to a kid [colourful and flavours]. With cigarettes, at least they’re showing on the package what smoking cigarettes can do to you. They don’t do that on vape boxes.” [Year 7/8, male, vapes]

“It’s quite bad. They’re the adults and we’re young kids, and they’re supposed to be role models for us.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

“It’s hard to even conceive that they’d go into an office just like that and try and design something to hook kids. That aspect of it is kind of hard to believe. It’s hard to believe that they would advertise vapes to kids like that.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

“It’s a pretty uncomfortable reality because they definitely know what they’re doing.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

Perceptions of vaping compared to smoking and other drugs

VAPES ARE PERCEIVED BY MANY TEENAGERS TO BE LESS HARMFUL THAN CIGARETTES...

... but just as addictive.

Vapes and cigarettes are perceived to be different. A minority see them as different but equally harmful, but more see them as less harmful than cigarettes, though not entirely harmless.

Cigarettes are perceived to have more harmful consequences than vapes, partially due to this messaging being drilled into teens from a young age. Comparatively, it is understood that because vapes are relatively novel, there is not enough research about their long-term impacts.

It is known that vapes are addictive and can be as addictive as cigarettes. It was mentioned that vapes may be more harmful because they are cheaper, easier to access, particularly for teenagers, and are more discreet than cigarettes.

Smoking cigarettes is seen as a 'thing of the past' and something older adults do. The smell, flavours and pretty packaging of vapes make them more attractive to teenagers. In comparison to cigarettes and other drugs, vaping carries less stigma and is more socially acceptable. The age of take-up for vaping is considered to be much younger than cigarettes, alcohol and other drugs.

When it comes to initiating drug use, teenagers regard vaping and alcohol to be the first things teenagers try, followed by marijuana and lastly cigarettes (if at all).

The experience of vaping is perceived as very different to smoking, in terms of appeal and harm. They understand vaping is 'inhaling vapour with nicotine', whereas smoking burns tobacco and nicotine to create ash. The impact of second-hand smoke from vapes is also seen as less harmful than cigarettes. There is also a perception (though not widespread) that vapes have less nicotine than cigarettes.



I DON'T HAVE OR NEED AN ALTERNATIVE TO VAPING SO WHEN I'M NOT VAPING EVERYTHING IS JUST NORMAL. I KNOW THAT WHEN MY FRIENDS DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO VAPES, THEY SMOKE CIGARETTES AND SOMETIMES WILL SMOKE MORE WEED THAN USUAL.

Year 11/12, female, vapes



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

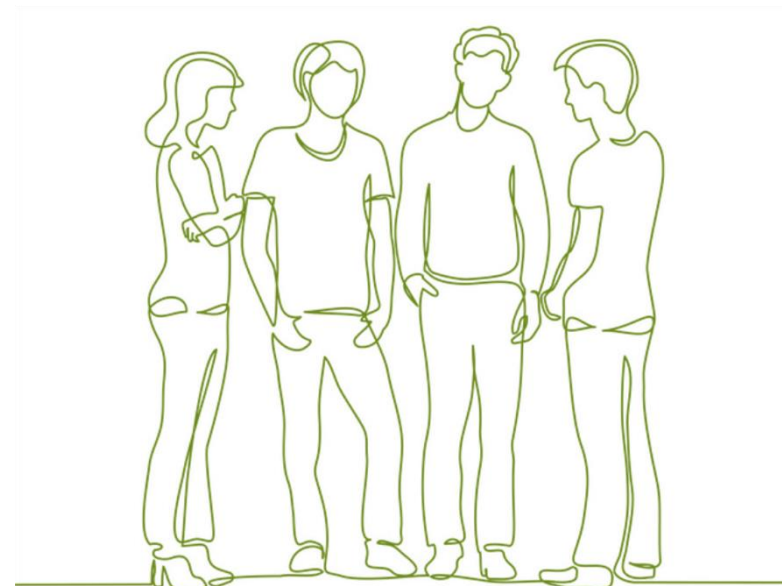
“Cigarettes don’t look appealing. A vape is appealing, looks less harmful.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

“Vapes feel like they are more for a child. With cigarettes, the raw tobacco doesn’t look appealing. For a person our age, you look for something more appealing and that looks less harmful, a colourful little box. In a cigarette you can see the lungs are black. You see a colourful vape and it doesn’t link up to the risks. It’s innocuous.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

“How can something that tastes like fruit be bad for you?” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

“I agree that vaping is safer than smoking because it contains less chemicals than cigarettes. Vaping doesn’t smell bad but when you think about all the chemicals inside it, it is horrible. Vaping is cheaper and comes in a nicer packaging than cigarettes (colourful boxes rather than those covered in the effects of smoking). I disagree that vaping isn’t addictive. It definitely is, and I can see people struggling to quit after they start and get addicted.” [Year 11/12, female, does not vape]

“They’re both addictive. My friends have tried to quit multiple times but have ended up going through withdrawals and not going through with the challenge. Teens always say they could easily stop, but by the time they’ve had a few vapes they are already addicted to the nicotine.” [Year 9/10, female, does not vape]



“Yep, definitely, I think cigarettes are still worse, not sure by how much. I wouldn’t do either, but I still think cigarettes are worse, maybe because that has been drilled into me from a young age.” [Year 11/12, male, does not vape]

“Vaping is different because of the stigma around cigarettes, which is non-existent with people who vape. I also do think that cigarettes are more harmful than vapes because of the black smoke that gets stuck in your lungs, however, I don’t actually know if this is true.” [Year 11/12, male, does not vape]

“Smoking seems to be a thing of the past. It was proven to be bad for your health, and that is more known to kids now, but there isn’t much evidence stacked up against vaping yet, so most people aren’t as cautious.” [Year 9/10, female, does not vape]

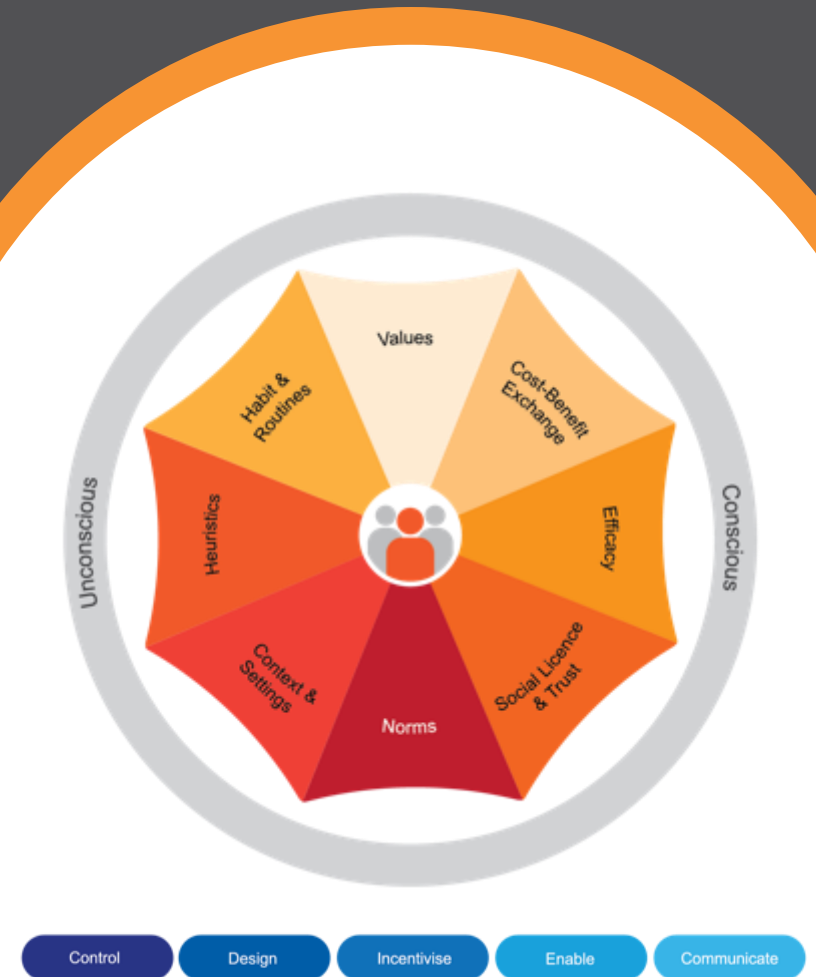
Why teenagers vape: attitudes, beliefs and motivations

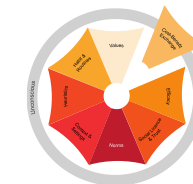
THE BCC'S BEHAVIOURAL FRAMEWORK

In order to fully explore and diagnose the influences (barriers and facilitators) on teen vaping, The BCC's Behavioural Framework (adjacent) was used. This Framework is:

- **A ROAD MAP** for identifying and understanding behavioural influence.
- **UNDERPINNED** by leading theoretical and applied models of behavioural psychology and behavioural economics.
- **ASSEMBLED** so that it supports dual process theory of how the mind works, accounting for both automatic (unconscious) and reflective (conscious) influences on behaviour.
- **THE LINK** to the identification and prioritisation of the right mix of levers for intervention design.

For this teen vaping study, four areas of influence were dominant: **the cost-benefit exchange, self-efficacy, norms, and context and settings.**





BENEFITS – VAPING IS A SOCIAL EXPERIENCE AND FACILITATES BONDING AND CONNECTION BETWEEN TEENAGERS

For teenagers who vape, the perceived benefits far outweigh the costs.



VAPING TASTES GOOD AND IT SMELLS GOOD. THIS JUST MAKES ME WANT TO DO IT MORE, AS WELL AS THE FEELING OF HEAD SPINS AND THAT FUN FEELING IT HAS. VAPING ALSO PROVIDES ENTERTAINMENT, AS PEOPLE CAN TEACH EACH OTHERS COOL NEW TRICKS TO LEARN WITH THE SMOKE.

Year 9/10, female, vapes

SOCIAL ENABLEMENT: Vaping facilitates social interactions and creates a sense of belonging. Most teenagers mention vaping in social settings: with friends or close mates, in small groups or larger groups at parties and in school bathrooms, while listening to music and hanging out. Vaping is a way of fitting in, bonding and forming new friendships.

ENJOYMENT: Vaping ‘feels’ nice. The many ‘yummy’ flavours, the smell, the taste and getting head spins create a sense of enjoyment. Vaping can sometimes be used to relieve boredom.

ESCAPE: For some teenagers, vaping is a way to relieve stress, relax and escape from or cope with problems. For some, it is the safer option compared to self-harm, smoking or using other substances such as marijuana and other drugs.

FUN: Blowing rings, ‘ghosties’, bubbles and learning new tricks is fun to do with friends, and offers a sense of achievement when mastered.

Although not widespread, vaping is an appetite-suppressant for young women. For some teenagers, it is a way to make money through re-sale.

Vaping offers significant benefits in comparison to smoking – it tastes and smells better, it can be enjoyed in places where smoking is not allowed (indoors), and can also help teenagers who smoke to wean off cigarettes (the least mentioned benefit).

Enjoyment, fun, the ubiquity of vaping, and vaping as an escape are all reasons teenagers maintain their use and do not vape less.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“I personally view the benefits as greater than the costs, I enjoy it and it makes me happy.” [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

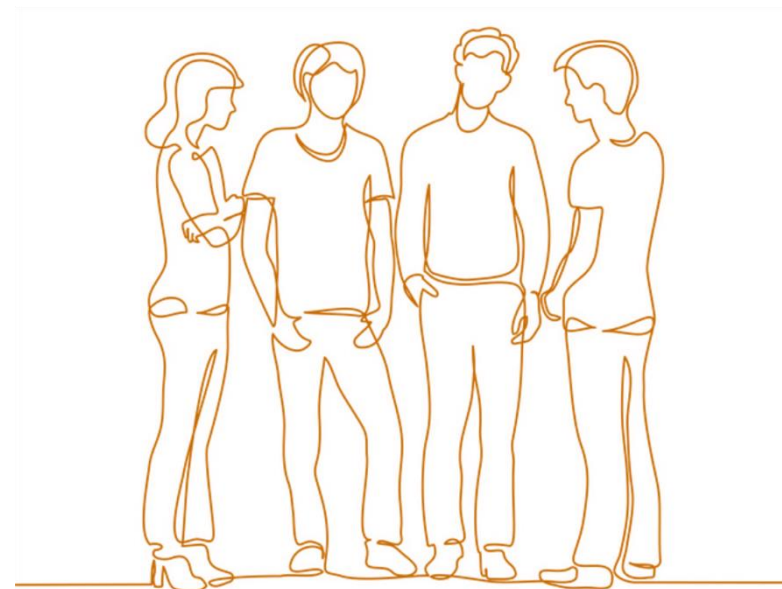
“When a teenager has a lot on, it helps to take their mind away from everything they need to do.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

“It can help people that suffer from anxiety or depression. It can be something they do that helps them calm down or feel better in general.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

“It can relieve stress for some people who are addicted to it, and it can look cool. It can also be fun to try and do tricks with.” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

“The good thing about vaping is that there are a variety of flavours you can choose from. I guess another good thing is that you can teach yourself how to do really cool tricks, like makings bubbles and rings in the air. Vaping can also be a better alternative for people who don't want to smoke. I know vaping is bad, but it's better than smoking cigarettes.” [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

“It's a calming and illusionistic feeling that many people find relaxing. Vaping can also help socially, as buying someone a vape or giving them a hit of the vape will uphold your status with them.” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]



“Vapes have a flavour to them. This makes it feel like you're eating when you're not.” [Year 7/8, female, vapes]

“Vaping, as silly as it sounds, is cool. You're blowing a smoky substance out of your mouth in different ways. There are all sorts of tricks and things to learn with it, and it's fun being able to show your friends that you can blow rings or ghost. It also smells and tastes good and there are so many options for the smell and taste. The social aspect of it is also good; people sit around and pass the vape and talk and hang out, while smoking can be quite isolating because a lot of people can't stand the smell of cigarettes. It's also good that you can do it indoors as opposed to smoking.” [Year 11/12, female, vapes]



COSTS – FEAR OF ADDICTION IS THE DOMINANT BARRIER TO VAPING

For teenagers who do not vape, the perceived costs outweigh the benefits. Addiction, long- and short-term health harms, social and relationship costs are the main reasons teenagers choose not to vape.

ADDICTION: Teenagers recognise that the nicotine in vapes creates dependency. Some have witnessed addiction first-hand with family members who are addicted to smoking and they do not want to follow in their footsteps. A few see vaping as a gateway to smoking and other drugs. Some admit to being addicted and express regret.

HEALTH HARMS: Fear of health harms and valuing a healthy body are secondary. Vaping is relatively new, and little is known about the long-term effects. Some teenagers associate it with smoking and note cancer, lung damage and heart damage, the impact on the developing brain and general health risks as reasons not to vape, or not to vape more than they already do. Some limit their use to avoid long-term damage.

Concerns of short-term harms also act as a deterrent. Most mentioned the fear of lung-related harms such as shortness of breath, airway irritation, breathing difficulties, lung inflammation and inhaling harmful chemicals. Brain impacts were mentioned to a lesser degree, including the effects on the developing brain which affects reflexes and decision-making and the impact on mental health. Loss of energy, loss of vision, vomiting and seizures from battery acid were also mentioned.

SOCIAL COSTS were mentioned by a few. This included being excluded from social gatherings for being ‘boring’, not being invited to parties and generally feeling ‘left out’ for not vaping. Although not prominent, the fear of being stigmatised for vaping was mentioned by those who choose not to vape or choose not to associate with people who vape.



I DON'T WANT THE 'SOCIAL BENEFITS' OF DOING IT. THE POPULARITY SOME PEOPLE EXPERIENCE FOR BEING 'THE COOL KID' SEEMS SO ARTIFICIAL. I WOULD RATHER BE POPULAR FOR BEING ME AND STICK WITH MY GENUINE FRIENDS.

Year 9/10, female, does not vape

RELATIONSHIP COSTS: A few mentioned the risk to relationships with their parents. They do not want to have to keep vaping a secret or break their parents’ trust or disappoint them. Parents can be a strong positive influence, and fear of damaging family relationships is what keeps some teenagers in the non-vaping group.

Some mentioned financial cost as a barrier to vaping. Vapes are regarded as a waste of money, and some teenagers would rather spend their money on other things. This is particularly true of younger teens, and those who are older but don’t have a job. A minority mentioned that vaping may affect school performance and other school-based opportunities, and as such choose not to vape.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“We don't know heaps about the impacts of vaping, and it isn't talked about at school in drug education classes. It's also super unhygienic, everyone sits on the couch and puts the same puff bar in their mouth, one after another. Everybody's germs are just getting passed around which is super gross. Addiction is always bad, so that's a negative.” [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

“Not being able to feel normal when you don't vape for a while, or when you don't vape for a while, you get very irritable and short fused with people. It also damages your physical and psychological health. Another is nicotine dependency – very, very hard to quit, I have tried a few times myself.” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

“It's more like how much money they cost, if they were cheaper then I would always have one on me.” [Year 7/8, male, vapes]

“I have friends who are super dependent, and I don't want to be like that.” [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

“My parents would be very disappointed if they found me with a vape. I'm also scared of addiction, so the very real possibility that I would become addicted if I started vaping more freaks me out.” [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

“If my mum and dad found out, I would be dead.” [Year 7/8, male, does not vape]

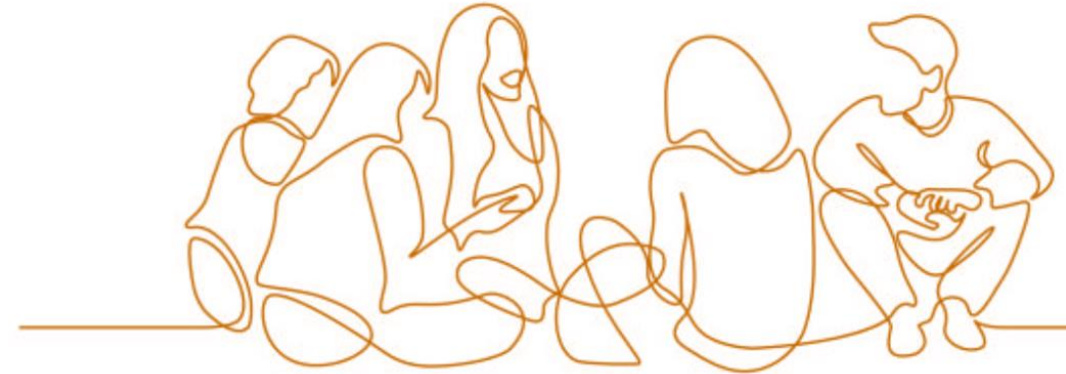
“I know of the health risks that it can cause me, especially as I'm considered a state athlete now. I can't afford to get addicted.” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

“I don't want to get addicted because once you are it's hard to stop. I also want to focus more on school and pass my classes, I don't want to be behind in my subjects just because I want to 'relax'... I also don't want to affect my health and my lungs, and risk getting ill.” [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

“The cost and how powerfully addictive they can be are the main reasons I monitor my use.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

“The cost of vapes have become so expensive lately. Last year I was buying disposables for \$20 – \$25, but now they're priced between \$35 and \$45 which is definitely stopping me from buying them. I didn't mind going \$10 halves with my friend for a bit of fun but any more is just too much considering neither of us have a job.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

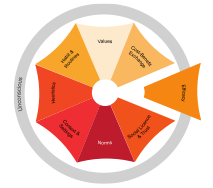
“People ask random strangers if they can have a hit of their vape just because they are craving it so bad.” [Year 11/12, female, vapes]





THE ADDICTION I HAVE ACCUMULATED OVER THE MONTHS OR YEARS MAKES IT THE HARDEST PART TO VAPE LESS AND ALSO BEING SURROUNDED BY VAPERS EVERYDAY, MAKING IT EASY TO GET A QUICK PUFF.

Year 9/10, male, vapes



SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES, SOCIAL PRESSURE AND THE DEPENDENCY ON NICOTINE ERODE SELF-EFFICACY TO STOP

The smell and flavours maintain desire. Affordability also plays a role.

Although teenagers overwhelmingly deny they feel pressured to vape, the pressure comes from seeing everyone doing it rather than being constantly offered or coerced to vape.

Some teenagers believe that there would not be any social consequences to not vaping, however others fear feeling left out. Some lower and middle high school teenagers said they have been excluded from social activities for not vaping, labelled as 'boring' and called names such as 'pussy' and 'wimp'. A few chose to stop hanging out with teenagers who vape as they did not want to be associated with those who push vaping onto others.

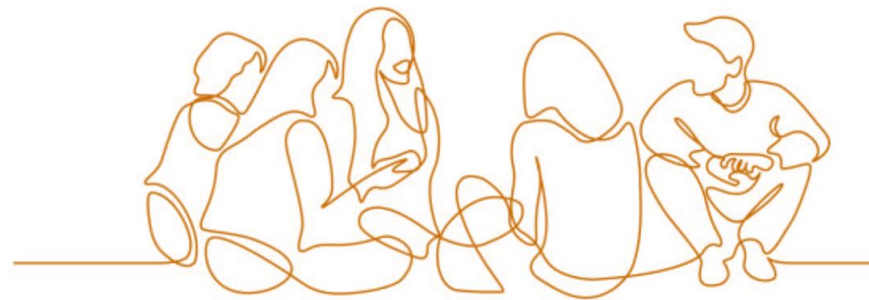
Social consequences are minimal for teenagers in upper high school who seem to be more discerning of their friends and more understanding and accepting of vaping as a personal choice.

The smell and taste of vapes keep drawing teenagers in and make vaping hard to resist. The dependency on nicotine leads to more frequent use, and makes stopping hard. But it is the ubiquity of vaping, the perception that it is a majority behaviour and the endless opportunities teenagers have to vape, that erodes a teenagers' confidence and self-efficacy to cut back or quit.

Saying no to vaping or stopping would be easier if vapes were inaccessible or unaffordable, if teenagers had fewer opportunities to vape and if they stopped as a group.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS



"I've never felt pressured into vaping. All my mates that vape don't ever pressure me into vaping, it's all my choice whether I do it or not." [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

"I didn't feel pressured when I had the first vape. I decided to get one since I had tried other people's and enjoyed it. Then my close friends around me started vaping as well, which could have been my influence to have one." [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

"I have never really felt pressured to vape and just generally accept when I'm offered. Occasionally I would specifically seek one out, but it was a rare occurrence." [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

"I didn't feel pressured, more invited to. I wanted to try it, so when my friends offered, I tried." [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

"I have never felt pressured because if I ever didn't want to vape, I would just say no. People normally just respect your decision and don't pressure you further." [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

"I have tried to surround myself with people that know when someone says no, they mean it." [Year 11/12, female, does not vape]

"I don't think there would be any consequences, I just think you might feel left out. I think people would respect your decision though, especially my friends respect that I don't vape, and would probably still respect my decision to do it, even though they might not agree with it/want me to." [Year 11/12, male, does not vape]

"I personally didn't feel pressured to do anything as it was my idea to try vaping first. None of my friends are ever pressured to vape, some of them don't want to and some do, which is completely fine. There are times when other people try to force people to hit a vape and they will do it just so they don't look like a loser, but I think it's annoying when people are rude and make people do it when they don't want to." [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

"Not at all, I have never received peer pressure in my entire life. It's not like the movies at all, yes people offer you drinks, alcohol, vapes, but if you say no, they respect that. They don't push you to do anything." [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

"I do not feel pressure to vape. I think one of the biggest misconceptions is peer pressure. My friends and I do not feel pressured by our peers to partake in drugs, vaping and drinking alcohol, most of the time we do it because we want to... If someone offers me a vape, I tell them no thanks and there are no more questions asked, I'm not pressured to take it." [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

"I've never felt any pressure to vape, my friends are super chill about trying things when you want and are ready which is pretty cool." [Year 11/12, female, vapes]



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"I think it has affected some people's view of me as maybe being 'boring' in a way because I didn't take part and thus could lead to them not asking me to do things with them in the future as they feel I might be uncomfortable or disagree with the things they do. This then results in me being left out of group gatherings due to people thinking of me as someone who wouldn't be interested, which impacts me socially as I am then left out of the good parts that don't include vaping..." [Year 9/10, female, does not vape]

"I did feel pressured at first, I had no intention of doing it but seeing the people who surrounded me doing it, I finally caved in." [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

"Only really two times. They were both pretty much the exact same situation, just different days. At a party and a guy in my year came up to me and pretty much told me to do it in a friendly way... The idea of me vaping was funny because I wasn't really friends with that group at the party too much and I didn't seem like the type to vape. I was pretty drunk, and I was talking to this girl as well as the guy who offered it who were pretty popular, alongside like three of his friends who were encouraging me, so I just kind of thought 'why not?'" [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

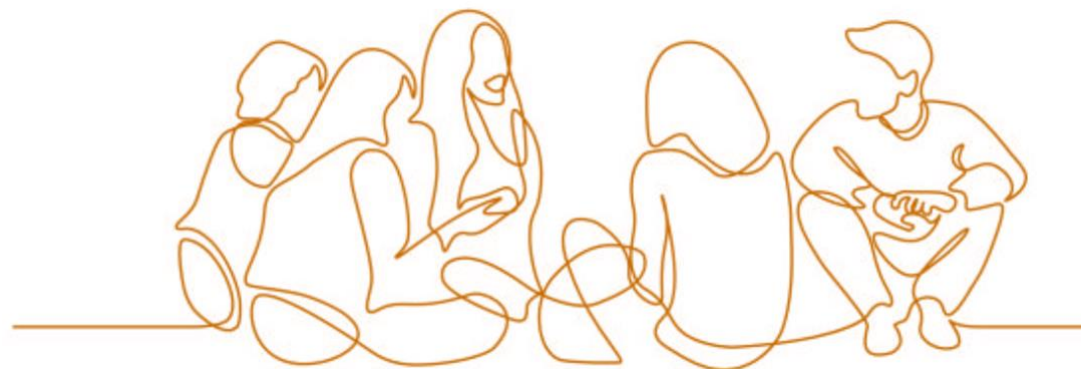
"I did feel pressured, but I haven't since then. I wanted to try vaping anyway, but wasn't completely ready when they asked me. I didn't want to seem uncool or childish, so I just did it. At first I said 'no, I'm alright' and turned away, but then my other friends came and told me it's fine and just to try it because it's 'so good', so I ended up being embarrassed and just did it." [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

"I did feel pressured because it was all over my friends' Snapchat stories and they were all trying to convince me to do it, but I didn't want to because I wanted to stick with healthy lungs for my sport. I managed the situation by just doing it and getting it over and done with. I remember I said I would do it again and buy one with my own money because I want to have fun." [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

"I did feel a bit pressured into it but in the end, I did make my own decision to take the vape. I remember that I kept saying 'I don't know if I should', but they both were like 'it's tastes really good', so I guess I just wanted to know what it tasted like." [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

"There was a bit of pressure. I didn't want to be the only one that didn't do it." [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

"...To look 'cool' in front of my friends, I ended up vaping." [Year 9/10, female, vapes]





IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Why it's so hard to vape less often

"It's very hard to cut back because you are constantly with people who are vaping and it kind of lures you in. I've tried multiple times, but it's still very difficult. It would be easier if I didn't hang out with people who vape a lot. It is possible but it takes a long time and dedication." [Year 7/8, male, vapes]

"I have tried to stop a few times but still hasn't fully worked. It's always hard when your mates always have a vape around you. But yes, stopping vaping is possible." [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

"The prevalence of vapes around me. If no one around me had one, I would never vape." [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

"The fact that I'm addicted and that I always have one in arm's reach, and it makes it hard that all my friends still do it around me." [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

"Something that stops me from vaping less is that feeling of doing it, I have this sense of enjoyment that I didn't have before, and I don't want to miss out." [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

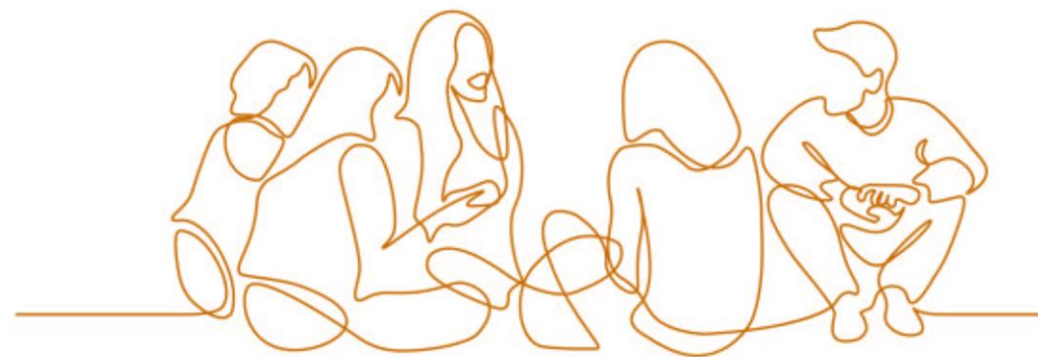
"It is very difficult to cut back as I have tried myself to do so. When you don't do it for a while you feel like something is missing and out of place, like when you leave for work and you forget something, but you can't quite figure out what it is, and you know you're missing something important. I believe cutting back is definitely possible but requires determination and willpower." [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

"When I used to vape, I could never cut back on it because I relied on it every day to make me happy and feel complete. What makes it hard is that it becomes a routine, and it gives a sense of sadness when you don't have it so when you do it makes you happy. Cutting back is possible, it's just hard." [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

"Over the summer holidays I didn't vape at all, it didn't affect me but then again, I wasn't at a place called school. Summer holidays are fun, while school is not. When you're having fun, you don't think about stuff you do at school." [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

"I am vaping less, but I still do it when I am with my friends and when I am drinking alcohol, partly because everyone around me does it and I feel the need to do it, but also crave it." [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

"It would be easier to stop if they didn't have nice flavours and no one around me vaped." [Year 9/10, female, vapes]





TEENAGERS WHO VAPE ARE NOT TOO DISSIMILAR FROM THOSE WHO DO NOT

Negative stereotypes emerge for cigarette and marijuana users, but not for teens who vape.

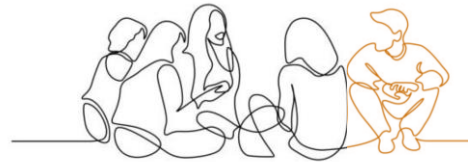


TEENS WHO VAPE

There is no typical teenager who vapes. Teens who vape range in all attributes. They are seen as social, talkative and happy. They are fun, outgoing and adventurous, chill, relaxed and down to earth. They might care more about what others think of them and about fitting in and less about rules. They might be more likely to engage in risky behaviours. They value their social life and being accepted, value a good time and close friendships.

At school most manage well, although they can be distracted at times and may leave class to vape. They might be more worried, dealing with social and emotional issues and use vaping as a means to cope.

Teenagers who vape are seen as doing the same things as those who do not, but they need the vape to do and feel what teens who do not vape feel without it.



TEENS WHO SMOKE CIGARETTES

Smoking is a very noticeable behaviour, and teenagers tend to do it in smaller groups and places that are less visible. They may have transitioned from vapes to cigarettes and may also do drugs. Cigarettes are expensive, and smoking is less common and socially undesirable.

Teenagers who smoke cigarettes tend to be older, may have grown up around people smoking, perhaps come from a less affluent home, may have a tough home life and are not close to their parents. Some are seen as lazy, angry, aggressive and not nice to people they do not know.

They are perceived to be less focussed on school, may have dropped out, are not into sports, party more, hang out with the wrong crowd and crave attention. When not partying, they are believed to be withdrawn and hanging out in their room.



TEENS WHO SMOKE MARIJUANA

Teenagers who use marijuana may have vaped or smoked and it's no longer 'enough'. They are also seen as older, again perceived as likely to have school and/or family issues, perceived as not doing well in school, or having dropped out, not academic, not well-parented, or with absent parents, may get into trouble. Some view them as the 'naughty kids'.

They can be seen either as a 'problem', or as a 'chill' person. They tend to distance themselves from family and value their time alone. They are most likely surrounded by other weed smokers or teens who do other drugs.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

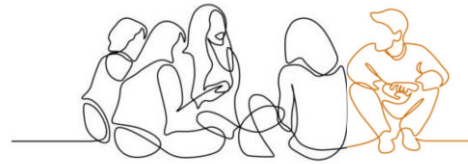


TEENS WHO VAPE

“A typical teenager who vapes is essentially the same as a teenage who doesn’t vape with a few small differences, such as they value school less, they value rules less, and they care more about popularity.” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

“I think it varies. I have friends who are really addicted, go out a lot and drink and smoke and do other drugs, and then I know people who are really studious and do well in school, who have really good morals and don’t do drugs but just vape in social settings.” [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

“Lots of different teens vape. I’ve seen upper class, lower class, private school, public school, girls and boys.” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]



TEENS WHO SMOKE CIGARETTES

“Not too many teenagers smoke cigarettes any more but they are usually a more ‘bogan’ type of person.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

“Does a fair amount of drugs. Does illicit things pretty often. Engages in behaviours that are potentially harmful. Views themselves as thuggish, are seriously addicted, or aren’t coping in life. Would probably drop out of school.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

“She is 15, got into smoking because her parents do and she was surrounded by it. Goes to school but maybe doesn’t do too well. Outside of school is mostly spent working to pay for the cigarettes because they are so expensive. Pretty social outside of school.” [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

“Bad home life. Usually get it from parents, but nice people. Out a lot and parents don’t care.” [Year 11/12, female, vapes]



TEENS WHO SMOKE MARIJUANA

“This person is 16, they have given up on their school and family, maybe they have had trauma with their family. They smoke marijuana because they feel it’s an escape from all the pain they’re in, caused by home and school.” [Year 7/8, female, does not vape]

“The first time I smoked marijuana I was 12. A teen who smokes weed is a mix of energetic and mellow, in a way. They always feel in third person, no matter if they are high or not, but only if they are so used to actually being high. They are the fun friend in the group but also can be the quiet one, and sometimes only hang out with people who they smoke with. Outside of school, they try to smoke weed as much as they can, but also try to be social. At home they distance themselves from their families sometimes, and like their time alone”. [Year 7/8, male, vapes]



WHEN IT COMES TO VAPING, A TEENAGER'S OWN OPINION MATTERS MOST

A trusted adult's opinion also matters. This includes parents, coaches, health professionals and family members.



*I TAKE NOTICE OF THE OPINIONS OF EVERYONE,
BUT I ONLY REALLY VALUE MY OWN AS I AM CAPABLE
OF COMING UP WITH MY OWN CONCLUSIONS.*

Year 9/10, male, does not vape

For most teenagers, their parents' opinions matter as they respect and trust them, look up to them and do not want to disappoint them. However, teenagers' own opinions on vaping matter most as they believe they can form their own views on the subject.

Friends' opinions matter. They are the people teenagers are close with, who know and respect them. Friends influence behaviour more than any other influence. Some mentioned teens who vape, or who used to vape as reliable 'experts' on vaping.

Teachers who teenagers are close to (trust) and sports coaches were mentioned as trusted messengers whose opinions also matter – 'they want you to succeed to the best of your ability'. Health professionals' opinions matter as they are educated on the topic and have reliable evidence.

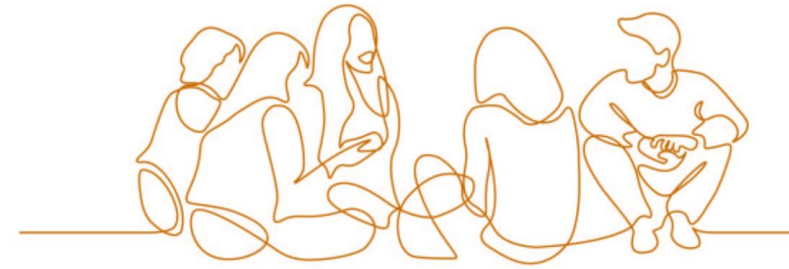
OPINIONS ON VAPING THAT DO NOT

MATTER: Teenagers tend not to care about teachers' opinions if they do not have a close relationship. Some teachers give non-specific reasons for not vaping, or just say 'don't vape' or 'it's bad for you'. This approach just reinforces the belief that there is no compelling reason not to vape.

Some teens do not value their parents' or their friends' opinions on vaping as they believe that they are uneducated on the subject and do not know enough about vaping.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS



DOES NOT MATTER

“I didn't include teachers because teens don't usually want to listen to their teachers. Teachers usually just say the same thing and don't really give you the advice you really need.” [Year 9/10, female, does not vape]

“Everyone else's (other than parents and siblings) because I shouldn't care what other people think of me as long as I think I'm doing what is right then that is all that matters.” [Year 11/12, female, does not vape]

“Even if you have cool parents, I still wouldn't go to them to ask them about vaping, tell them what I'm doing, and/or what they think.” [Year 11/12, male, does not vape]

“Teachers and therapists are probably the people I don't listen to because I don't trust them as much as I do family and friends. You need to have trust in people to actually listen to them and take their advice.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

“My mum's. She doesn't understand contemporary things. Not her fault, she's just 52. Just what happens when you are older.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

MATTERS

“Another type of person I would listen to is someone with professional knowledge of the risks of vaping and reliable proof.” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

“I want to make my parents happy, and I want them to always be proud of me so whatever they say I will follow so they aren't disappointed in me.” [Year 11/12, female, does not vape]

“I think the opinions that matter the most in this sort of situation would be your friends and your siblings, because they are most likely to understand you and your reasoning for vaping.” [Year 7/8, male, vapes]

“Vapers want opinions from people who understand their struggle and are willing to help them out for their good... Either other people who have gone through the same thing, or an experienced person in that area.” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

“The people that will have the most reliable answers will be the vapers because 90% of the time, vapers will tell you not to vape and because you know it is coming from a person that vapes you will most likely stay away from it more.” [Year 9/10, male, does not vape]

“A sports coach and doctor's opinion really matter as they contribute to physical health, and they can advise you on the future limitations you could have by vaping, whereas parents and siblings' thoughts are more about your feelings about the topic and how it could affect you finding a job or your social life.” [Year 9/10, male, does not vape]



VAPING IS NOT MORALLY WRONG. IT IS 'WRONG FOR YOUR HEALTH'

Taking a moral stance on vaping increases curiosity and rebellion.

Vaping causes health harms and it is therefore wrong for developing bodies. However, vaping is a personal choice and it should be up to the individual to decide if it is right or wrong for them.

Teenagers do not pass moral judgement. Vaping is a personal choice. If teenagers are educated on the harms and choose to vape, then it is foolish, but not wrong. Vaping is not wrong if it is a way to cope with anxiety, it is not wrong if it is a substitute for other drugs, it is not wrong if it is a substitute for self-harm. It is wrong if it is not used in moderation and if it leads to dependency and addiction or has other negative impacts.

Warning teenagers that vaping is wrong and they should not do it, without substantiating evidence and compelling reasons not to will only feed their curiosity and their innate desire to rebel. They are, after all, teenagers – testing boundaries, learning to take responsibility and making mistakes in the process.

I DON'T THINK THAT IT IS MORALLY WRONG TO VAPE, BUT THERE ARE MANY LEGITIMATE REASONS TO CHOOSE NOT TO DO IT. IT'S A CHOICE THAT NEEDS TO BE MADE BY THE INDIVIDUAL PEOPLE AFTER BEING INFORMED OF THE EFFECTS OF VAPING.

Year 11/12, male, vapes

“

IN THEIR OWN WORDS



“It may be wrong to vape and if so, being told that isn't an issue. The issue is when people are being told not to vape but not being told why. We need a reason. We need the consequences and to be properly educated on the issue. Even with that, we may still do it.” [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

“I believe that as a teenager, we're inclined to do what we're told not to do, it's human nature. I think if a teenager is explained properly why it's wrong to vape, it's better than just being told to not vape. If one is given with reasons and logical explanations, they're more inclined to listen. I think it's only okay to tell someone it's not okay to do something if there's good reasoning behind it.” [Year 9/10, female, does not vape]

“I believe the whole reason I started vaping is due to my parents telling me to never try it and sheltering me from it, causing me to become more and more curious and eventually wanting to try it... I don't believe it's 'wrong' to vape...But I don't think it's good at all for health.” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

“I don't think it's wrong and you can do it sometimes, but I think it isn't wise. I think vaping is bad for your health, mental health and attention span which could affect your social life and schoolwork. I think vaping could be fun occasionally but it's hard to know when to stop so you need to know your limits and not start regularly vaping.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

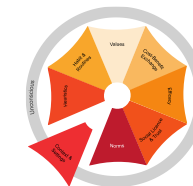
I think that it can be wrong if it starts to impact you negatively and is causing you health issues. But if it is done in moderation with friends and doesn't become an addiction then I think it is okay.” [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

“I think when you refer to something being wrong it means something totally different than being bad for you, even though those two can cross over. An example of something being wrong would be harming someone, that goes against humanity and is morally wrong but an example of something being bad for you would be getting extremely drunk. It's not wrong to get drunk if that's your personal preference but it can be bad for you.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

“I think it is okay to experiment with a vape to understand what it is, but I don't think teens should own one and become addicted as a result of doing it every night/day and then therefore relying on it. This would then lead to a lot of negative impacts on their body and mental health.” [Year 9/10, female, does not vape]

“The way people go about preventing it is the wrong way because if you tell teenagers not to do something with no reason other than 'it's wrong' or something else that doesn't educate them, there is a chance they will do it anyway.” [Year 11/12, female, does not vape]

“It honestly depends. It's your life, you can do what you want. As long as you know/understand the consequences that vaping may lead to, it's not wrong. However, if you are doing it not understanding the full consequences of doing it, you really should not vape then since you have no idea where you are getting yourself into... No one has the right to tell you to vape or not. Some people do it as a coping mechanism, some just do it for fun and some people don't do it at all. Your body, your choice. You just have to deal with the aftermath if you do it.” [Year 9/10, female, does not vape]



SCHOOLS ARE A KEY SETTING FOR VAPING

Vaping is primarily an interpersonal behaviour, not a place-based behaviour – it is who you are with, not where you are. However, place settings do enable and facilitate vaping by normalising it, creating the sense of ubiquity.

Vaping on school grounds, in toilets and change rooms is very common. Schools are aware and some have started locking toilets outside of break times. Others have installed silent vape detectors to minimise vape use.

Despite this, teenagers still vape at school. Some are bold enough to vape in class. Vapes and vaping are hard to avoid at school. They are also easy to get. Some teens admit to re-sale of vapes as a means to make money, and most teenagers purchase from someone they know. Most of the time is someone they know from school.

Schools are not the only place teenagers vape. Teenagers vape in public communal spaces in shopping centres, parks, or at the train or bus stations, in hidden public spaces, in alleyways and behind buildings, or at friends' houses and parties. They typically vape in social settings, in groups where vapes are shared, but not always. Teenagers who are addicted to vaping are likely to vape on their own, sometimes at home.



UNFORTUNATELY, VAPING IS VERY COMMON IN AND OUT OF MY SCHOOL.

SOMETIMES I'LL GO INTO THE BOYS' TOILETS AND SEE BOTH YOUNG AND OLD HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS VAPING.

Year 11/12, male, vapes



... IT WAS EASY NOT TO VAPE BECAUSE I DON'T HAVE MY OWN VAPE AT THE MOMENT AND I KEPT MYSELF BUSY.

... I LASTED ALL OF ABOUT ONE DAY BECAUSE EVERYTHING JUST GETS HARDER WHEN YOU'RE CRAVING – HARDER TO BE NICE, HARDER TO DO NORMAL STUFF BECAUSE ALL YOUR MIND IS FIXATED ON [IS] HOW IT'S GONNA GET ITS NEXT DOSE OF NICOTINE.

Year 11/12, male, vapes

THE CHALLENGE OF NOT VAPING

Our teenagers who vape were asked to undertake the behavioural challenge of not vaping for a weekend – from Friday afternoon till Monday morning. Some found it easy, and some found it impossible. Afterwards, we asked them why they think they succeeded or failed.

Some experienced withdrawal, but many found the abstinence challenge a relatively straightforward task because it occurred over the weekend. The lack of access or opportunity to vape that came with not being at school was highly determining of success. The social and contextual features of a person's weekend also shaped the likelihood of success (or failure).

Younger teenagers who spend most of their weekend at home, supervised or at least with a degree of adult oversight reduced the opportunity to vape. Amongst teenagers who were not addicted to nicotine, almost all found it relatively easy to avoid vaping all weekend. Not owning a vape, and having no opportunity to be offered or share one in a social setting also contributed to success. Older teenagers with a more vibrant social life chose to change who they hung out with over the weekend, deliberately trying to minimise their exposure to others vaping around them, and the opportunity to share one.

Some who succeeded in abstaining questioned their ability to continue not vaping once they returned to school, and several who abstained all weekend did in fact vape at the first opportunity on Monday.

Those who struggled or failed to stop vaping over the weekend were overwhelmed by cravings and withdrawal symptoms, and/or succumbed to direct or unintentional pressure from their friends, either because they were around people who were vaping or they were offered a vape. A couple lived with family members who vaped. Having one's own disposable vape made the abstinence challenge far more difficult.

WHAT HELPS TEENS WANT TO STOP VAPING

Before they can ask for help, teens need to know how to recognise the symptoms of addiction in themselves (or other immediate health harms related to vaping), and be confidently able to self-diagnose.

Importantly, teenagers don't know where to get help to quit vaping, but if support exists it needs to be tailored to teenagers, and free of judgement.

Ideally, they would like to talk to someone who has been through it/what vaping addiction is and can 'speak their language'.



A CHAT LINE appealed to teenagers because it affords both anonymity and is the format of communication they are most comfortable with. The appeal of a chat line service increased if it was known the person at the other end had successfully quit vaping themselves, and knew what teenagers would be dealing with in trying to quit.

Conversely, the option of calling a help line escalated the perceived effort and seriousness of getting help, and felt too intimidating as a first step to get help, besides the fact that teenagers don't call anyone these days!



A WEBSITE appealed to a very small minority of teenagers. Whilst it is considered a useful, anonymous but trusted information source, it is not likely to be somewhere they would go first to get help to stop vaping. Going to a website was felt to be 'too hard', unless it provided practical help via a self-assessment calculator or tool for diagnosing nicotine addiction and/or translating their vape consumption to the number of cigarettes they are consuming.



TALKING TO SOMEONE YOU KNOW included parents, a family member or a friend – none of whom was considered to be a completely safe, trustworthy or authoritative option. Whilst talking to a friend felt easiest, friends (along with parents) were considered to be the least authoritative sources of help.



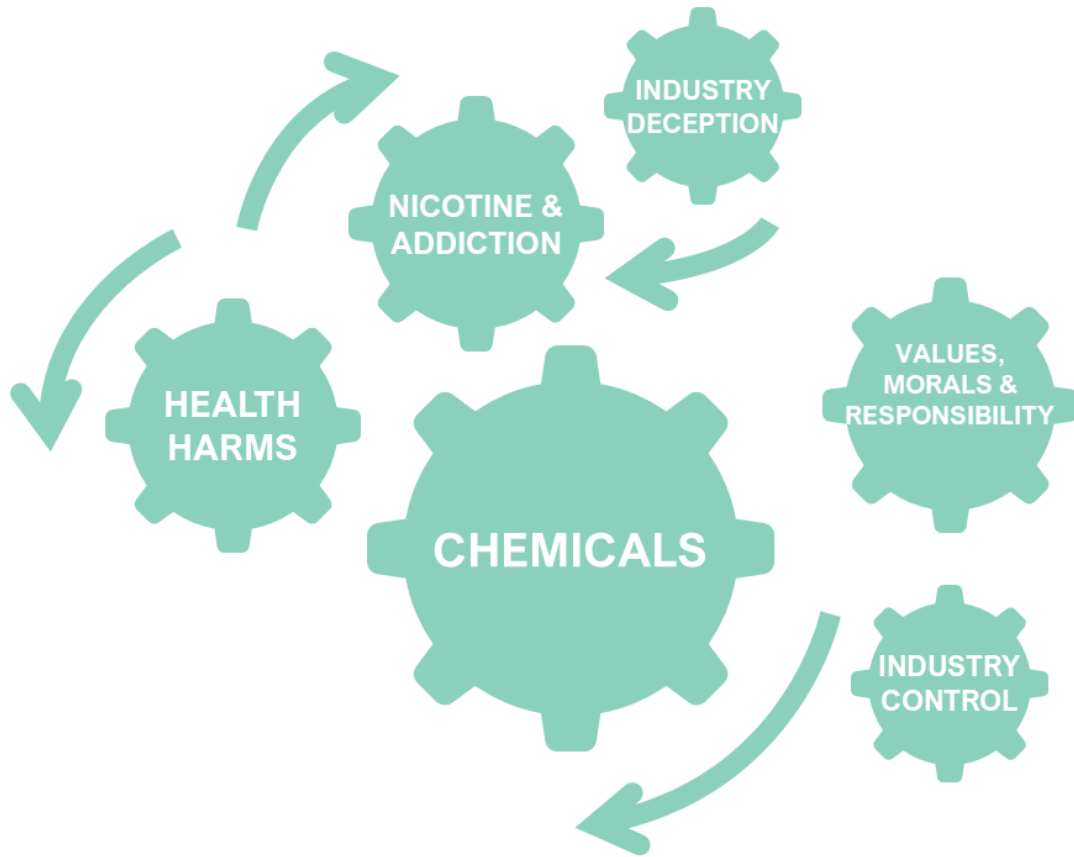
TALKING TO A DOCTOR stood out as the most knowledgeable and helpful of quitting options, but would be teenagers' last resort because of their concerns about privacy, and the effort and risk associated with getting an appointment with a doctor without their parents finding out.



HELP AT SCHOOL was a viable option, if it could be accessed confidentially and without sanction. The **school nurse** was considered 'a safe place', the person at school with the most credibility and ability to help students quit, far more so than teachers. The kinds of help teenagers would seek from the school nurse included help managing withdrawal symptoms at school (through classes and breaks, and how to deal with others vaping around them) and for referral to additional quitting support.

Implications for messaging approaches and styles

IMPLICATIONS FOR MESSAGING



APPROACH

Five potential themes emerged from the first stage of the research and an environmental scan of teen anti-vaping campaign approaches in Australia and the United States: chemicals; health harms; nicotine and addiction; vaping industry deception, manipulation and control; and values, morals and responsibility.

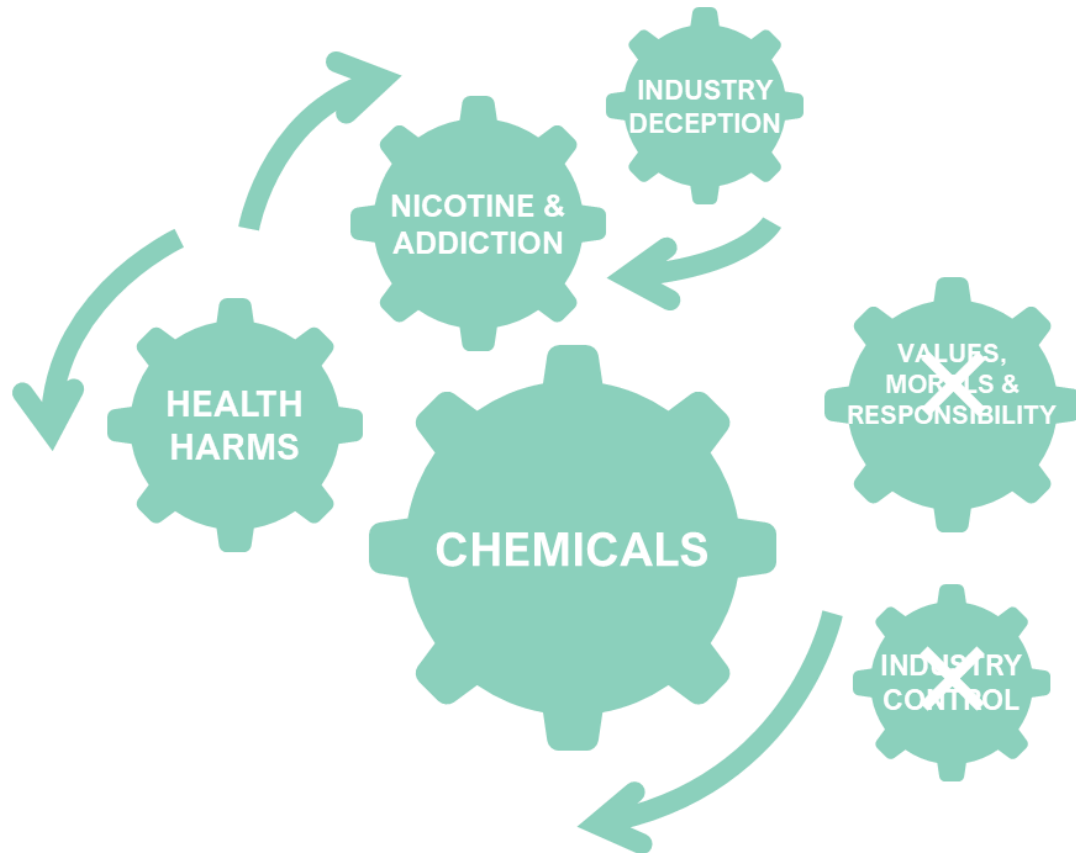
The feasibility of each theme was further explored with participants (a mix of those who vape and don't vape) in stage two, in order to gain an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each, their perceived believability and their potential to engage teenagers via three core health communications effectiveness metrics:

- Relevance and **personal susceptibility**
- Affect – **perceived severity**/impact
- Novelty – **surprise**, new news

Each theme was presented with stimulus as a suite of existing material (posters, digital ads) and a range of fact statements (presented without imagery).

It is important to note that the purpose of the message exploration was not to test the effectiveness of individual items of communication, but the potential of different messaging approaches and language within each collective theme.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MESSAGING



OVERALL

Three themes – **chemicals, health harms, and nicotine and addiction** – have the potential to perform well on one or more of the three measures, and when put together built a credible and arresting narrative of **why** vaping is ‘bad for you’.

Of critical importance is how these themes are communicated, from both a content and imagery perspective.

The other two themes (morals, and vaping industry control and manipulation) were rejected:

- Teenagers reject outright a moral argument for not vaping, as it sits counter to their investment in free choice and avoiding judgement of others, and it provides too much opportunity to debate what is ‘wrong’ or ‘right’ for an individual.
- Some teenagers fail to comprehend and others to internalise the notion that they are being manipulated or controlled by the vaping industry – on the question of control, they perceive that if control is ceded, it is to the person offering or selling them the vape, or to their own nicotine addiction. They do not buy into the demonising of the industry itself.

However, the theme of **industry deception** did engage and enrage some teenagers. The story of deception was felt to naturally link to the lack of labelling of chemical ingredients and nicotine content, and the lack of health warnings regarding addiction and health harms.

Further diagnosis of each theme follows.



CHEMICALS

IMPLICATIONS FOR MESSAGING

FACT STATEMENTS

- You're not vaping water.
- Vape aerosol is not water vapour.
- Vapes can have the same harmful chemicals found in cleaning products, nail polish remover, weed killer and insect spray.
- Vapes can contain harmful chemicals, such as diacetyl and heavy metals. They just don't say it on the packaging.
- When you vape, you can breathe in the same harmful chemicals like in weedkiller. They just don't put it on the packaging.
- Vapes use flavours to make them appealing. But you can breathe in the same harmful chemicals like in cleaning products and insect spray.

Key take-out: messaging about chemicals must provide answers (directly or via direction) to the question 'what chemicals?'. Teenagers know vaping is 'bad for you'; they don't know why or what's in vapes that makes it bad (other than nicotine). Teens who vape don't want to know and will dodge or discount the 'facts' that appear in their mind to be embellished to be scarier and work as fear and threat appeals.

- Teenagers do not wish to be told about chemicals, they wish to be **informed and enabled to investigate and authenticate** the claims in these statements themselves. Currently, there is no effortless or accessible way for them to do so.
- The most surprising and deterring statements about chemicals referenced **heavy metals, nail polish remover, weed killer and insect spray** (to a lesser extent). However, teens want more information than this – generic statements such as those we explored via posters and fact sheets were too easy to ignore or dismiss on the grounds of a lack of detail and substantiation. Digital delivery of messaging could address this.
- The chemical facts were effective in triggering and elevating **cognitive dissonance**, a necessary precedent to vaping rejection or resistance that occurs via the re-alignment of personal beliefs with non-vaping behaviour.
- Statements such as 'they just don't put it on the packaging' **backfired** – the assumption by teenagers is that the Government is responsible for labelling and packaging, and evokes the question 'why doesn't the Government put it on the packaging?'.

ADDICTION

IMPLICATIONS FOR MESSAGING

FACT STATEMENTS

Addiction looks like:

- Talk about your next hit a lot.
- Leaving class to vape.
- Need to have one on you all the time.
- Using it every day or every hour.
- You need to replace your vape as soon as it runs out.
- Feeling or behaving more emotionally than you used to – moody, angry, irritable.

Messaging about addiction alone doesn't deter, but it is a necessary contextual threat to everything else. Teens rationalise that if they're not addicted, all the other consequences are not as bad.

- Messaging does not need to explain the link between nicotine and addiction because it is well known and believed (thanks to decades of effective anti-smoking education).
- However, the threat of addiction only deters some teenagers, as they don't really understand how nicotine is addictive. The potential for informing and educating about addiction is on the basic science behind addiction, and on how to recognise signs of addiction in oneself or a friend.

"Sprinkle addiction into all messaging to make sense. Addiction is 'this' and it will cause 'this' and these are the signs – it will change how your brain works and then there's one key ingredient in vapes that causes addiction, and that's nicotine. Nicotine will draw you back in." [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

"Knowing what addiction is and what actually causes it and how it can change you as a person. I think it is important to know that, but I think people don't really see it as an issue because if they haven't experienced it, they don't know what it's like." [Year 11/12, male, does not vape]

NICOTINE

IMPLICATIONS FOR MESSAGING

FACT STATEMENTS

- The nicotine in one vape can equal 50 cigarettes.
- Many vapes contain nicotine, which you can become addicted to very quickly.
- Vapes are a new way to get young people addicted to nicotine, which is often difficult to quit.

Messaging about nicotine is missing critical information about cigarette equivalency, because all that teens know about nicotine is in the context of cigarette smoking. There is potential to confront the perceived innocuity of vapes by shifting vaping closer to smoking with respect to harm and safety.

- Teenagers are interested in information about the equivalent number of cigarettes in a 5% nicotine disposable vape, or the cigarette stick equivalency to x number of vape puffs. They feel confronted and are deterred by the idea of their vaping being similar to smoking with respect to nicotine consumption and addiction risk.
- Messaging about cigarette equivalency would be more threatening as visual images comparing one pretty vape to 50 dirty cigarettes than a statement that conveys the same message.
- Assertions about how quickly one can become addicted to vaping, or that addiction is difficult to quit, are rejected by teens who feel that they are successfully avoiding addiction by limiting their use.



HEALTH HARMS – SHORT- AND LONG-TERM IMPLICATIONS FOR MESSAGING

FACT STATEMENTS

- Nicotine can harm the developing adolescent brain. The brain keeps developing until about age 25.
- It can cause long-lasting negative effects on your brain development. Nicotine changes the way brain synapses are formed in young people.
- Using nicotine in adolescence can harm the parts of the brain that control attention, learning, mood and impulse control.
- You may also experience a lack of concentration when you can't vape and you can have trouble sleeping.
- Usage can cause nausea, vomiting, mouth and airway irritation, chest pain and heart palpitations, irritability, restlessness, feeling anxious or depressed, trouble sleeping, problems concentrating and craving nicotine.

Teenagers want to know how long they need to be vaping for to experience these health effects. To be effective, messaging should talk about long-term harm first, and translate that to immediate impact in the body that they can't see right now (head spins, drowning lungs).

The fact statements were mostly believable but not sufficiently confronting, or personally threatening:

- Long-term effects are scarier, but short-term are more visible/noticeable, although some effects from vaping could be attributed to other things and not directly linked to vaping.
- Lung damage was the most obvious, credible and threatening health harm, undisputed by teens who vape and those who don't.
- Brain-related impacts were difficult to comprehend, and thus created less impact with respect to personal susceptibility. However, the idea of brain damage was highly threatening and would be effective if it were better understood and the risk more immediate.
- Heart damage facts were the least compelling and most tenuous of all the physical health harms – that is not to suggest that heart damage is not scary or threatening, but that the link to vaping was not effectively prosecuted.
- For teens who vape, messaging about harms to mental health were not taken as 'fact', and were questioned by many who vaped to help manage poor mental health, or who had friends that did. In this regard, vaping was not seen to be the cause of symptoms of poor mental health, but a coping solution. For teens who didn't vape, mental health messages were reinforcing of their decision not to vape, and thus carried merit by strengthening cognitive balance in favour of not vaping.



INDUSTRY DECEPTION AND CONTROL

IMPLICATIONS FOR MESSAGING

FACT STATEMENTS

DECEPTION...

Vape manufacturers don't tell us what's in vape liquid. There is currently ...

- No control over the manufacture of vape liquid.
- No product labelling or ingredients list.

CONTROL...

- Tobacco companies are continuously looking for new customers.
- Vapes are a new way to get young people addicted to nicotine, which is often difficult to quit.
- Vapes contain flavours, colours, and come as disposables cleverly created for teenagers to share.

Statements about industry deception and a lack of transparency were 'new news' and led teenagers to reconsider what's in vapes, providing a segue to messaging about chemicals and nicotine, and potentially increasing their cognitive dissonance regarding the safety of vaping.

- Teens strongly object to the idea of a cover-up or lack of transparency over what chemicals are in vapes, or the lack of disclosure about nicotine concentration.
- However, while the notion of deceit positions the vaping industry as untrustworthy, it also leads teenagers to question the role of Government and health professionals in the regulation of contents and labelling of vapes. Teens struggled to make the connection between vapes being illegal and thus unregulated and unsafe. Instead, they questioned why the vaping industry was allowed to produce vapes that contain dangerous ingredients and were not labelled as harmful.
- It was apparent that teenagers have been conditioned to rely on health warnings and ingredient labelling as a signal for safety. They have been taught to observe tobacco health warnings, and to interpret food ingredient lists and health claims. The absence of both on disposable vapes suggests to them that vapes are safe 'enough', or at least enables them to discount the risks and rationalise that they are 'bad but not that bad' (or we wouldn't be able to get them). All of this contributes to the resolution of cognitive dissonance in favour of continuing to vape, rather than stopping.

"With cigarettes, at least they're showing on the package what smoking cigarettes can do to you. And they don't do that on vape boxes". [Year 7/8, male, vapes]

CAN INFORMATIVE MESSAGING CHANGE THE PERCEIVED RISK OF VAPING?

Most teenagers attributed a higher 'risk' score to vaping at the end of the group discussion, compared to at the start.

THE PRE-POST EXERCISE

... Triad group participants were asked to rate how risky they feel vaping is for them, using a score from 0 to 10, where 0 = no risk and 10 = majorly risky. They were asked to do this twice, at the start and the end of the group discussion.

Their responses were recorded confidentially and privately on paper which they placed in a sealed envelope, so as to not influence others' answers nor to evoke judgement upon themselves.

Each participant was given a different colour pen so that individual pre- (baseline) and post-responses could be matched for analysis purposes.

It should be noted that this exercise was conducted with a small base of n=23 participants.

THE FINDINGS

... Girls of all age groups, whether they vape or not, had a higher baseline risk score – they tended to view vaping as riskier than boys from the outset.

Boys, whether they vape or not, had a lower baseline risk score. Year 7/8 boys had a significantly lower baseline risk score than all other school years.

THE RESULT

... Most participants reported a higher risk score after the group discussion, compared to at the start. A few doubled their risk score, others lifted it only marginally. The averaged increase was 15%.

Key take out implications for intervention design

KEY TAKE OUTS FOR INTERVENTION PLANNING

The research insights have implications for social marketing behaviour change intervention design. Intervention opportunities are discussed in a separate report: *Being Gen Vape – Implications for intervention design*.

1. Address the **perceived ubiquity of vaping** amongst teenagers, particularly amongst those who vape but also those who currently choose not to.
2. Address **cognitive dissonance** by increasing the understanding of how vaping is 'bad for you'. Teens who vape consciously or sub-consciously reconcile their choice to vape with a belief that vaping is 'not so bad' (as cigarettes, drugs and self-harm behaviours). Strengthen beliefs about the about the **immediacy, severity and personal susceptibility of harm**, ideally leading to an adjustment of behaviour to beliefs rather than the other way around, as it currently stands.
 - Address the belief that vapes are 'safe enough' because they are not labelled with ingredients or health warnings.
3. Erode the belief that **teens can control the impact of vaping and addiction by managing consumption** ("every vape (or puff) is doing you damage").
4. **Confront and disrupt the influence of hyperbolic discounting** – reduce the appeal of the two key benefits of vaping – social approval and the head spin ('hit'), by increasing the impact and threat of immediate effects and harms:
 - Make vaping unappealing, not uncool (**demonising the vape itself, not the behaviour or the person who vapes**). Aim to increase the number of teenagers who choose not to vape, and avoid inadvertently asking them to cast judgement on those who do.
 - The use of visual imagery and digital execution is important to disrupt and confront without exaggeration or obvious fear tactics (dark colours, depressive or scary music and sound effects). **Health effects and threats should be interpreted as scary because they are [fact], not because they are being scared**. In other words, expose the threat as it is, without the need to over emphasise it.
 - Persuade through information and education, **bring facts to life and show teenagers what's happening in their body that they can't see**. Examples include showing what the head spin looks like in the brain, what battery acid leak looks like in a disposable vape, what 'drowning lungs' looks like whilst vaping.

KEY TAKE OUTS FOR INTERVENTION PLANNING

5. **Build self-efficacy** to stop/reduce/avoid vaping:
 - Enable and support teenagers to say no to vaping when vapes are offered and shared.
 - Provide a **Teen Gen Vape pathway to quitting** – something for teenagers, with teenage ‘cred’.
6. **Move vapes closer to cigarettes** in terms of safety and harm, and tie the vaping industry to ‘harmful chemicals’.
7. Address the enabling influence of **price, supply and labelling**:
 - Teenagers are conditioned to rely on health warnings and ingredient labelling as a signal for safety. The absence of both on packaging suggests to them that vapes are safe ‘enough’, or at least enables them to rationalise that they are.
 - Vapes are far too easy for teenagers to get – in terms of price and supply, and many teenagers wish they were harder to access.
8. Consider **settings for interventions that are linked to trusted messengers** – parents, the school nurse, sports coaches and club leaders. While vaping is primarily an interpersonal behaviour (who you’re with), not a place-based behaviour (where you are), settings do facilitate and enable vaping by unintentionally permitting and normalising it, creating a sense of ubiquity.
9. Don’t ignore the **role of parents and other adults**’ own lack of informed knowledge, understanding and influence:
 - Vaping must be unequivocally framed as harmful for young people.
 - Parents need confidence and capability to have conversations with children about vaping, and how to support them to stop.
10. **Don’t frame vaping around risk** – always frame it around harm and safety. Teenagers already view vaping as one of the least risky things they can do.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

FEEDBACK ON THE RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

“Really good organisation, great ideas, and I gained more respect as you guys are taking the time to see our perspective.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

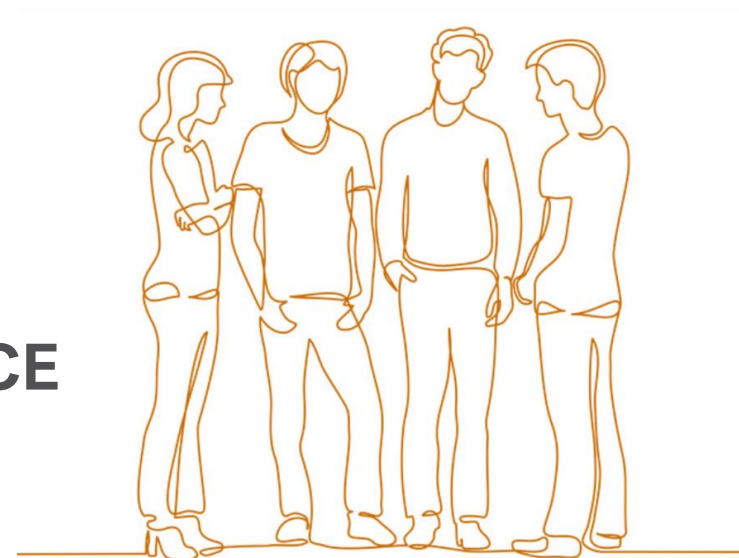
“I thought this was very well done and very easy to access and understand, thank you very much for this opportunity!” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

“I really enjoyed this survey. I like the different questions I was asked and how we had a group discussion on one of the questions, and I like how we got to see other people’s responses. It has made me think about if I still want to vape.” [Year 11/12, female, vapes]

“This online discussion was pretty good, and good at making me reflect on myself vaping.” [Year 9/10, female, vapes]

“The feedback I have is all positive. The way this survey was put out was amazing. It was really easy to understand, and the questions weren’t off topic, they were all relevant to what I signed up for.” [Year 11/12, male, vapes]

“I really enjoyed this survey, and it definitely opened my mind a lot more.” [Year 9/10, female, does not vape]



“I think it is done well. It’s a good amount of questions that don’t take a really long time but they still give lots of information.” [Year 9/10, male, vapes]

“I think it’s a great idea to get the information you’re using off of kids who might have a better understanding on the topic.” [Year 9/10, female, does not vape]

“Thank you for letting me take part in this investigation. I really enjoyed it and I think what you’re doing is a great idea.” [Year 7/8, male, vapes]

“I really liked this forum and being able to interact with you and ask questions if I didn’t understand the question properly or missed something.” [Year 11/12, female, does not vape]

For further information or to obtain a copy of *Being Gen Vape – Implications for Intervention Design* please email hello@thebcc.org.au

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The Behaviour Change Collaborative acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to the elders of the past, present and emerging.