



**GENERATION  
VAPE**

A research collaboration project



In partnership with  
**Cancer  
Council**

# Support for vaping policy reforms among young adult Australians aged 18-24 years

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Generation Vape would like to acknowledge the following partners

Research partners

**The Daffodil Centre**



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# Support for vaping policy reforms among young adult Australians aged 18-24 years

## Introduction

Vaping amongst young adult Australians, age 18-24, is the highest of all age groups. In 2022–2023, around half (49%) of people aged 18 to 24 in Australia reported having used an e-cigarette/vape at least once in their lifetime.(1) This was almost double the 26% who reported using an e-cigarette/vape in 2019. This rapid rise in vaping has spurred all Health Ministers from across Australia to be united in their support for Federal reforms that will restrict all vaping products to prescription-only access through pharmacies.(2, 3)

Reforms introduced in March 2024 already require prescription vapes to limit flavours to mint, menthol, and tobacco only. Additional product standards for therapeutic vapes will also be strengthened, including placing limits on nicotine concentrations, and requiring plain pharmaceutical packaging, and are likely to commence in late 2024.(4)

The primary aim of our short report is to assess how Australian young adult support for these proposed laws has changed over time. Secondly, our report considers if there have been changes to how young adults are accessing vaping products and the types of devices they are using. Finally, we report on how vaping quitting intentions and behaviours have changed over the survey period.

## Methods

The Generation Vape research project includes online cross-sectional surveys at 6-monthly intervals examining vaping attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and behaviours. From February 2022 (Wave 2), the research project has included a national young adult (age 18-24) sample. This short report presents survey findings from Wave 2 (February 2022) through Wave 6 (February 2024). Sample sizes for each Wave are reported in Table 1.

For the purposes of these analyses, regular vapers and regular smokers are defined as those who report vaping or smoking respectively at least monthly.

Ethical approval for the study was received by the Human Research Ethics Committee at The University of Sydney (reference number 2021/442). Informed consent was provided by participants to take part in the research after receiving a detailed Participant Information Statement.

## Findings

### Policy Support

The vast majority, 80%, of all age 18–24-year-old respondents in Wave 2 either supported, or did not oppose, (neutral position) policies to ban the sale of all vapes in retail outlets (Table 1). This significantly increased an additional 6% to 86% in the latest wave of data collection, Wave 6 ( $p<0.001$ ). This also significantly increased amongst regular vapers from 60% to 69% [ $p=0.006$ ; Table 2]) and amongst regular smokers from 62% to 71% ( $p=0.006$  [Table 3]).

This increasing trend in support for vaping policies is also observed in the support/neutral position for banning vape flavourings, (such as candy, dessert and fruit flavourings). In Wave 2, 74% of all young adults in our survey reported supporting or feeling neutral about policies to ban flavourings, increasing to 86% in Wave 6 ( $p<0.001$ ; [Table 1]). A similar increase in this position is also pronounced amongst regular vapers and smokers, from 52% to 65% for vapers ( $p<0.001$ ; [Table 2]) and from 56% to 69% for smokers ( $p<0.001$ ; [Table 3]).

**Table 1: All survey respondents age 18-24 on whether they support vaping policies**

	% support or do not oppose <sup>^</sup> policy statement					p-value*
	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5	Wave 6 <sup>&amp;</sup>	
Number of respondents (n)	n=2460	n=2069	n=2126	n=2018	n=2499	
Banning vape flavourings (such as candy, dessert and fruit flavourings)	74%	77%	81%	85%	86%	<0.001
Banning the sale of all vapes in retail outlets	80%	81%	85%	86%	86%	<0.001

<sup>^</sup> % who strongly support, support or are neutral towards policy measures

Note: means are weighted for gender, state, remoteness and age of the 2016 Australian population

& includes respondents who also participated in previous waves

\*p-value obtained is for test of differences in proportions across wave after adjustment for sex, age, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status, remoteness of residence area, SES of residence area and language spoken at home.

**Table 2: Regular vapers only on whether they support vaping policies**

	% support or do not oppose^ policy statement					
	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5	Wave 6 <sup>&amp;</sup>	
% of the sample	25.8%	23.4%	22.4%	20.4%	<b>17.8%</b>	p-value*
Banning vape flavourings (such as candy, dessert and fruit flavourings)	52%	49%	61%	62%	65%	<0.001
Banning the sale of all vapes in retail outlets	60%	59%	67%	68%	69%	0.006

^ % who strongly support, support or are neutral towards policy measures

Note: means are weighted for gender, state, remoteness and age of the 2016 Australian population

& includes respondents who also participated in previous waves

\*p-value obtained is for test of differences in proportions across wave after adjustment for sex, age, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status, remoteness of residence area, SES of residence area and language spoken at home.

**Table 3: Regular smokers only on whether they support vaping policies**

	% support or do not oppose^ policy statement					
	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5	Wave 6 <sup>&amp;</sup>	
% of the sample	22.1%	20.7%	18.1%	16.0%	16.9%	p-value*
Banning vape flavourings (such as candy, dessert and fruit flavourings)	56%	57%	69%	75%	69%	<0.001
Banning the sale of all vapes in retail outlets	62%	65%	72%	76%	71%	0.002

^ % who strongly support, support or are neutral towards policy measures

Note: means are weighted for gender, state, remoteness and age of the 2016 Australian population

& includes respondents who also participated in previous waves

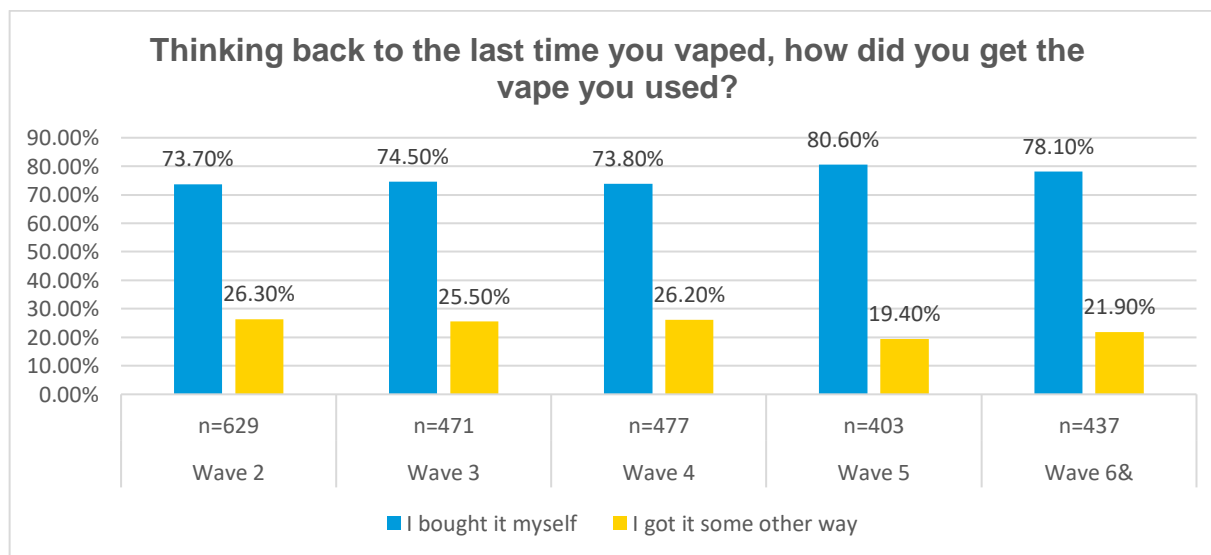
\*p-value obtained is for test of differences in proportions across wave after adjustment for sex, age, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status, remoteness of residence area, SES of residence area and language spoken at home.

## Vape access

Most young adult vapers purchase their own vape, with 78.1% of regular vapers reporting they bought their last vape themselves in Wave 6 (Figure 1). This is not a significant change since the beginning of the survey. In Wave 6, the majority, 80.8%, of regular vapers who bought their own vape bought it from a physical store. Over half purchased their vape from a tobacconist (52.6%). This was followed by a convenience store (10.7%), petrol station (8.9%), or a vape store (8.6%). A further 8.7% bought their vapes from an online vape store, with only a small number reporting using social media channels to buy their vapes: Snapchat (1.2%), Instagram (0.9%), and Facebook (0.8%) (Table 4).

In Wave 6, 78.8% all young adults report that accessing vapes is either very easy, easy, or quite easy, this is unchanged since Wave 2 (77.4%) (Figure 2).

**Figure 1: Regular vapers on how they accessed their last vape**



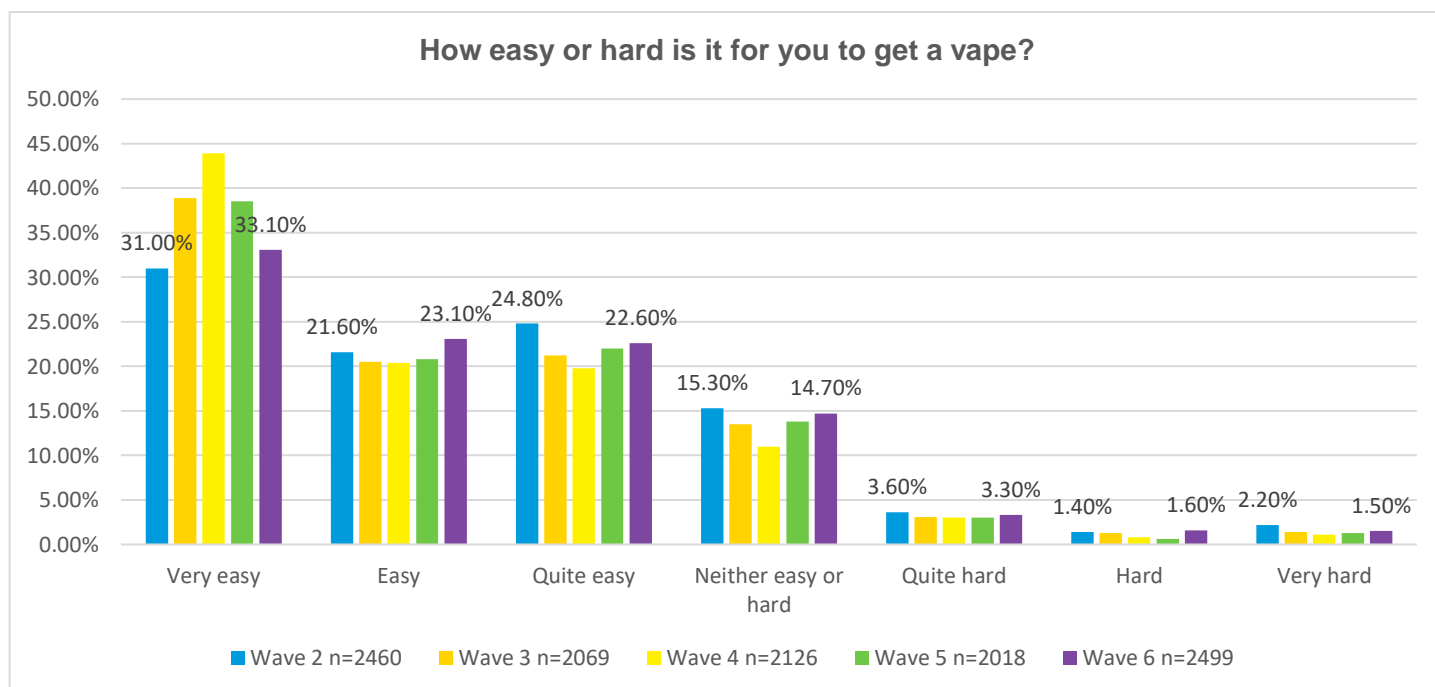
& includes respondents who also participated in previous waves

**Table 4: Regular vapers who bought their last vape on where they purchased it**

	Where did you buy the vape from?					p-value*
	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5	Wave 6	
	n=462	n=356	n=347	n=321	n=335	
<b>At a tobacconist / tobacco shop</b>	37.40%	38.60%	48.90%	44.60%	52.60%	0.168
<b>At a petrol station</b>	8.90%	8.10%	8.00%	10.60%	8.90%	
<b>At a convenience store (e.g. 7-eleven)</b>	13.40%	12.80%	13.20%	12.00%	10.70%	
<b>Through Snapchat</b>	1.30%	4.50%	2.50%	0.90%	1.20%	
<b>Through Instagram</b>	1.80%	1.30%	0.20%	0.60%	0.90%	
<b>Through Facebook</b>	0.60%	0.70%	0.30%	0.90%	0.80%	
<b>From a friend</b>	8.00%	8.10%	8.80%	8.40%	5.90%	
<b>Other</b>	1.00%	1.10%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	
<b>Online vape store</b>	13.10%	10.30%	5.60%	5.50%	8.70%	
<b>Vape store (physical store)</b>	11.90%	11.30%	10.20%	14.50%	8.60%	
<b>From someone selling them (not a friend)</b>	2.60%	3.00%	2.40%	2.00%	1.70%	

\*p-value obtained is for test of differences in proportions across wave after adjustment for sex, age, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status, remoteness of residence area, SES of residence area and language spoken at home.

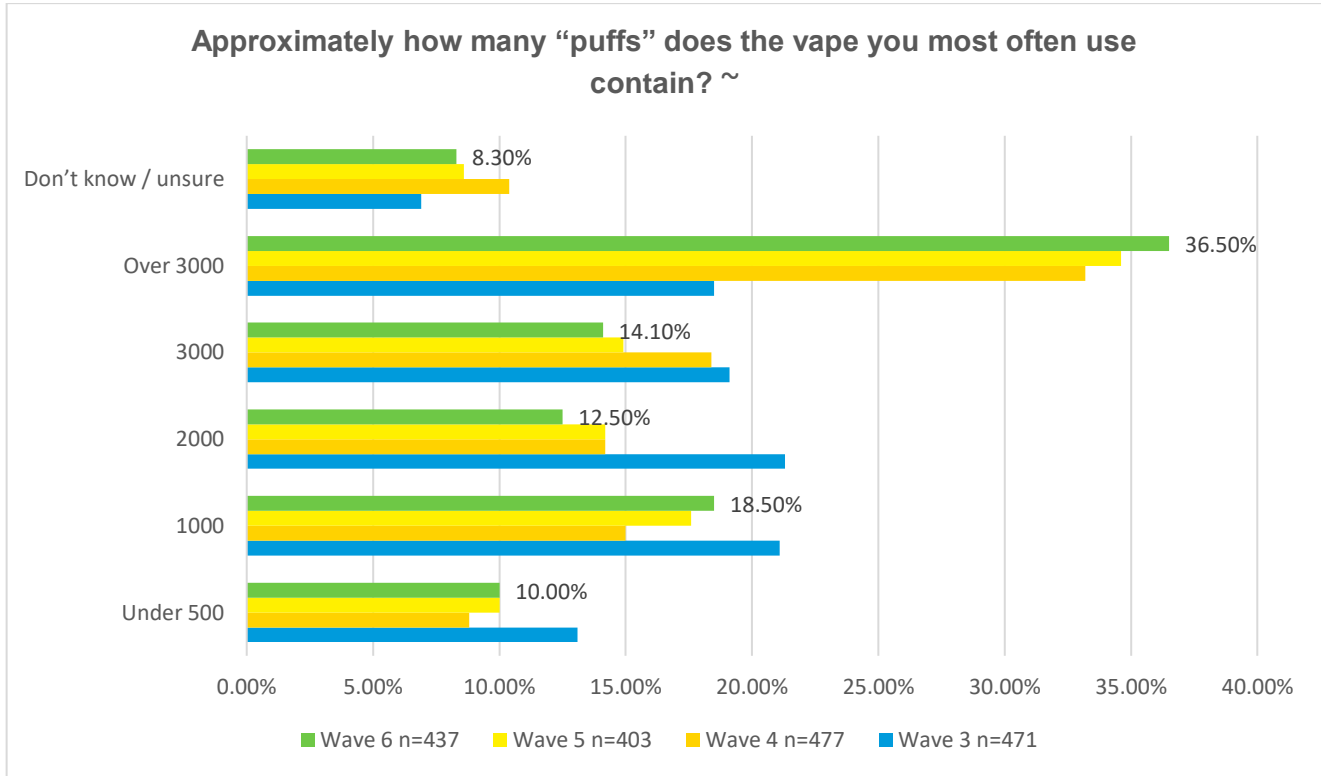
**Figure 2: All survey respondents on how easy or hard it is to get a vape**



## Device type

The puff-volume of the vaping devices that young adults use has changed significantly over the study waves. Since first asking this question in Wave 3 (August 2022), the number of regular vapers who use a device that has more than 3000 puffs has nearly doubled from 18.5% to 36.5% in Wave 6 and the number using small devices under 500 puffs has dropped from 13.1 to 10.0% (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Regular vapers respondents on how many puffs in their preferred device**



~Question added in Wave 3 (August 2022)

### Quitting intentions and behaviours

In Wave 6, 22.9% of regular vapers said they seriously thinking of quitting vaping in the next 30 days, with an additional 35.5% stating they were seriously thinking of quitting in the next 6 months. This is a significant change from Wave 2, where only 15.8% were thinking of quitting in the next 30 days and 26.1% in the next six months ( $p < 0.001$  [Figure 4]). Nearly half, 48.5% of regular vapers, said they had tried to quit vaping before, a rise of 16.7% as compared to Wave 2 when only 31.8% had tried to quit vaping before (Figure 5).

**Figure 4: Regular vapers on their intentions to quit**

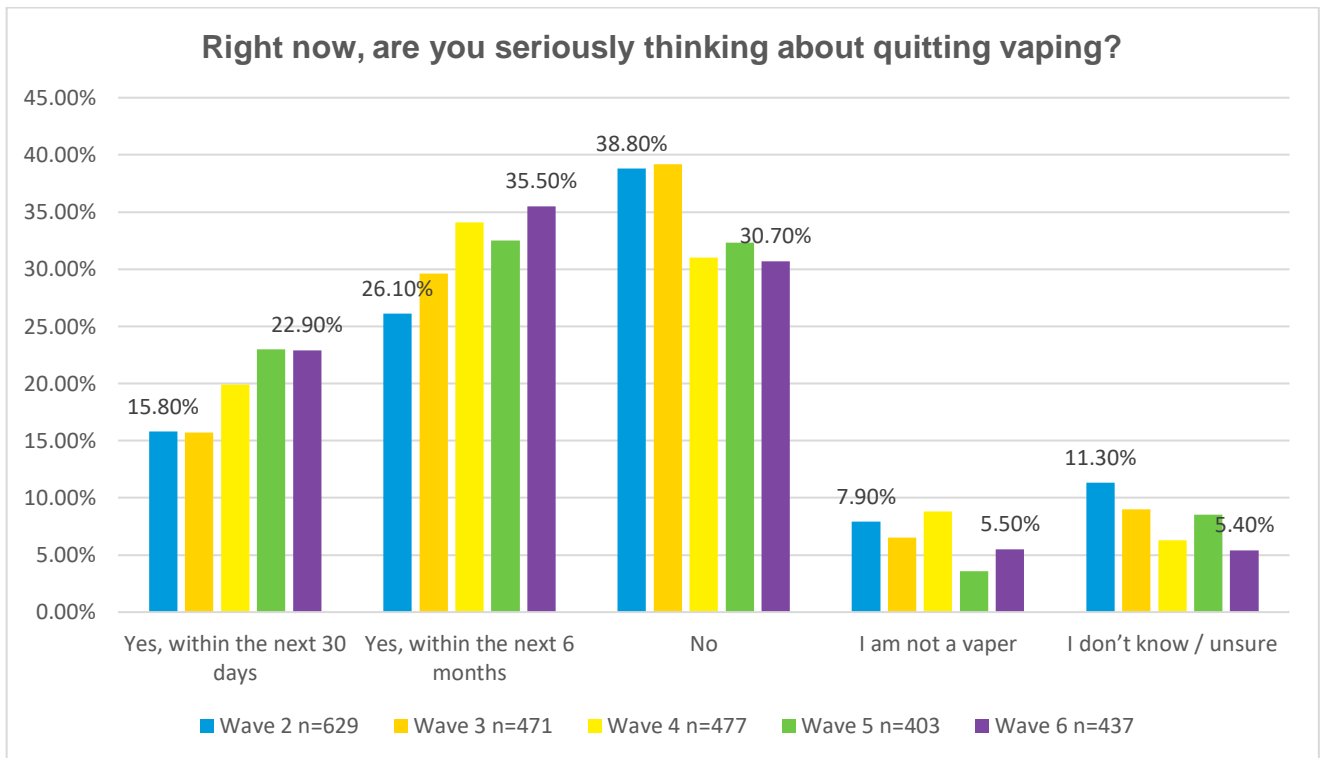
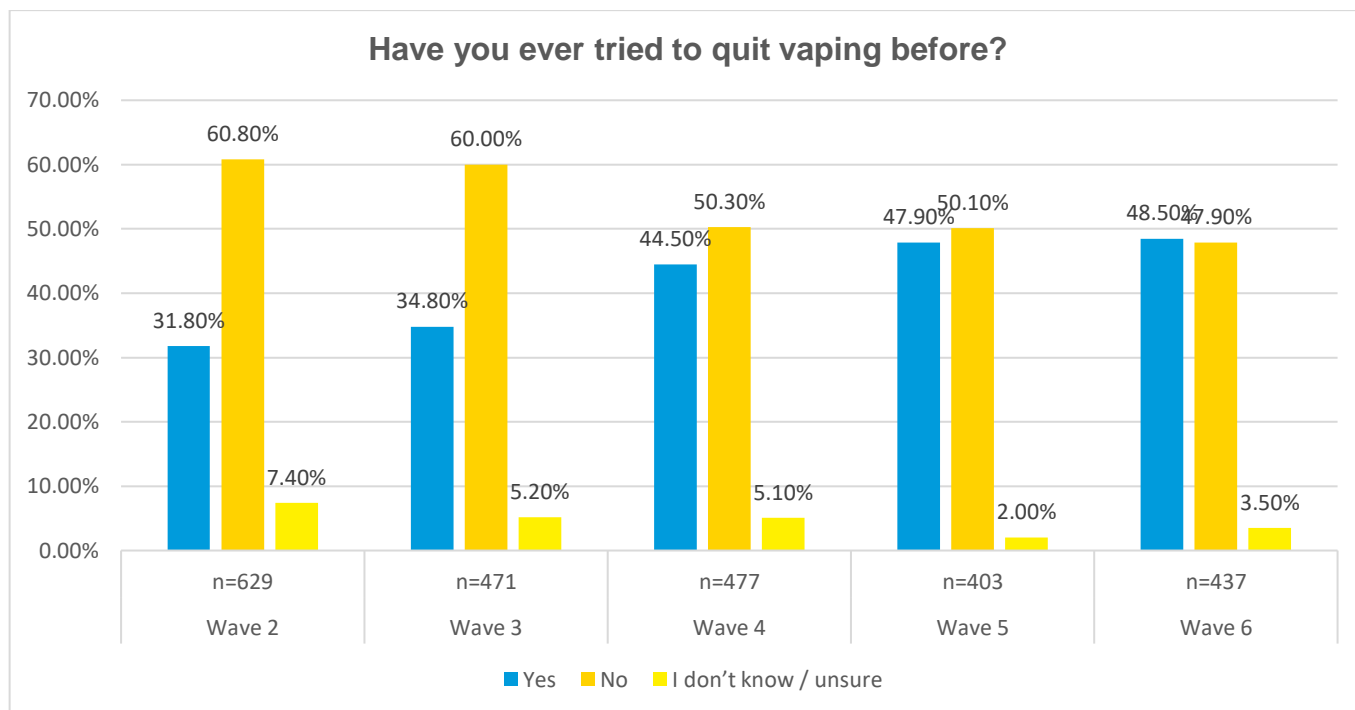


Figure 5: Regular vapers on their previous quit behaviours



## Discussion

The 18-24 year old participants in our study are the Australian age group most likely to use vapes. Despite this, their support for policies that restrict where and what type of vapes can be sold has been strong across the Generation Vape waves and has increased with time.

We know from previous Generation Vape analysis that young adults are increasingly concerned about vaping addiction and are planning to quit vaping.<sup>(5)</sup> The results from this latest wave show that significantly more young adults are seriously thinking about quitting vaping and have tried to quit vaping before. Policies that support these quit attempts, by addressing the easy access to vapes, will assist in increasing their quitting success. Given that most young adults are purchasing their vapes from physical stores, the removal of sales from these shops is key to reducing the accessibility of these products.

Vape manufacturers continue to innovate their product design and the rising popularity of high-puff volume devices over time reinforces how urgently the proposed pharmacy-only product standards are needed.

## Policy implications

Policies currently being considered by the Australian Government that will close loopholes that allow non-nicotine vapes to be sold at retail outlets like tobacconists, petrol stations, and convenience stores have high-support amongst young adults. Given that most young adults also purchase vapes easily from these same retailers, law changes that address this ready access are crucial to reducing vaping rates amongst young Australians.

Young adults strongly favour the banning of vape flavours; another key aspect of the reforms that means prescription vapes are only available in mint, menthol, and tobacco flavour varieties.

As more young adults are both wanting and trying to quit vaping, policies that support these efforts, including addressing the easy access to vapes are needed to create health promoting environments.

## Citation

Freeman B, Egger S, Watts C, Jenkinson E, Madigan C, Brooks A, Dessaix A. Support for vaping policy reforms among Australian young adults aged 18-24 years. Cancer Prevention and Advocacy Division, Cancer Council New South Wales, May 2024.

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