

Perspectives of Quitline clients who vape: findings from qualitative interviews

Catherine Segan^{1,2}, Georgina Halse³, Stevie McMillan³, Emma Dean¹, Donita Baird¹, Eve Mitsopoulos¹, Eileen Cole¹, Sacha Filia¹, Lindsay Whelan¹, Sarah White¹ & Beth Greenhalgh¹

¹*Cancer Council Victoria, Melbourne, Australia*, ²*Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia*, ³*Social Research Centre, Melbourne, Australia*

Presenter's email: cathy.segan@cancervic.org.au

Introduction / Issues: Quitline has seen increases in both the number of new clients who i) report vaping in the last 30 days and ii) who are seeking support to stop vaping.

Method / Approach: To understand Quitline clients' experiences of vaping and the cognitive and emotional drivers that influence their vaping, 30 in-depth interviews were conducted via Zoom between September 2022 and January 2023. Interviews took place six weeks after the client's initial Quitline call. The sample included adult clients who, when they initially spoke with Quitline, were quitting vaping (16 clients), vaping to quit smoking (10 clients) or were considering vaping (4 clients).

Results: Sample-wide themes included the lack of an authoritative source for credible information about vaping, and high availability and social acceptability of vaping. Common experiences included rapid escalation of vaping behaviour, a range of negative health impacts (physical and mental), some benefits of vaping ('healthier alternative' to smoking, mood regulation), and difficulties with reducing and quitting vaping. Quitline was viewed as supportive and helpful for addressing nicotine addiction.

Discussions and Conclusions: The findings demonstrate a disconnect between current regulation (nicotine vaping as prescription only for smoking cessation) and the understandings and experiences of Quitline clients. It appears that even people who smoke(d) (who could benefit from vaping for smoking cessation) are experiencing difficulties with controlling their vaping and are reporting negative health effects. Further research with representative samples is needed to ascertain how common these experiences are among Australians who vape.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Consideration should be given to communication campaigns to increase public awareness around the health impacts of vaping, the prescription requirement for nicotine vaping and that Quitline can provide behavioural counselling to help people understand their vaping experiences and can help people to stop vaping as well as smoking.

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