

Title: Whole of community approach to address adolescent e-cigarette use

Authors: Catriona Lockett^{1,2}, Kym Rizzo Liu¹, Caitlin Betts¹, Smita Shah^{1,2}

¹ *Prevention Education and Research Unit (PERU), Research and Education Network, Western Sydney Local Health District, Sydney, Australia*, ² *Sydney School of Public Health, The University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia*

Background/Purpose:

Adolescent e-cigarette use has emerged as a pressing public health challenge in Australia, necessitating responses that extend beyond individual behavior change. Recent data indicates that 19.8% of Australians aged over 14 years have tried e-cigarettes, highlighting the need for local approaches that address the social and environmental factors contributing to this trend. Our project applied a whole-of-community approach within Western Sydney schools to create supportive environments for e-cigarette prevention and cessation.

Approach:

We initiated a multi-phased project informed by the needs of the school community to address adolescent e-cigarette use, supported by partnerships between the Department of Health and Education. In phase 1, we conducted a needs assessment of vaping in the school community and established Special Interest Groups in e-cigarette prevention and cessation. In phase 2, we listened to students, school staff, parents, and health professionals to understand their perceptions of adolescent vaping and preferred prevention strategies. In phase 3, we developed a suite of student-led initiatives to prevent vaping, including the Breathe Easy All Together (BEAT) peer-leadership program. In phase 4, we collaborated with local health services to deliver workshops for wellbeing school staff, upskilling them to support e-cigarette cessation among students.

Outcomes/Impact:

The needs assessment revealed a lack of Australian context-specific resources on adolescent vaping. Extensive community consultation showed a strong preference for a holistic, health-centered approach, emphasising education, student empowerment, and cross-sectoral collaboration. This feedback informed the development of capacity-building initiatives for students and staff, with school staff reporting an increased “sense of control” in addressing vaping within their schools.

Innovation and Significance:

Addressing adolescent vaping requires more than individual behavior change; it demands community-driven strategies that tackle underlying social determinants and support cross-sector collaboration. Our project illustrates how a supportive environment—engaging youth, school staff, and parents in a shared commitment to health—can proactively mitigate adolescent vaping.

Disclosure of Interest Statement (example):

The Prevention Education & Research Unit received funding from the NSW Department of Education and Eastern Creek Principals Network to support our whole community approach. We also recognise the need for transparency of disclosure of potential conflicts of interest by acknowledging these relationships in publications and presentations.