

The Understanding Vaping Study: A qualitative exploration of the experiences of socially disadvantaged Australians using nicotine vaping products for smoking cessation

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Introduction: Nicotine vaping products (NVPs) are commonly used smoking cessation aids. However, there is little in-depth qualitative understanding about the lived experiences of using NVPs for smoking cessation. This qualitative work explored experiences of socially disadvantaged Australians using NVPs for smoking cessation, as well as subsequent vaping cessation. Insights will guide the development of a text message intervention aimed at increasing dual switching from cigarettes and vaping after a successful quit smoking attempt using a NVP.

Methods: This qualitative research involved in-depth interviews conducted by staff from UNSW, Sydney. Interviews were conducted online via Zoom or audio call. Previous or current smokers (n=28) from socially disadvantaged backgrounds (proxy marker: receipt of government pension) who were provided NVPs in a previous smoking cessation clinical trial were sampled. Participants were purposefully sampled to ensure a range of quitting experiences and vaping statuses (e.g. daily vapers or those who quit vaping) were explored. Semi-structured interviews examined barriers and enablers to quitting smoking with NVPs, day-to-day vaping characteristics, access, perceptions and attitudes and messaging themes for smoking and vaping cessation.

Results: Data collection commenced May 2024. Results from in-depth interviews demonstrated that amidst a rapidly changing regulatory environment, there were economic, social and regulatory barriers to smoking cessation when NVPs were used in a quit attempt. Participants expressed a desire for highly tailored text-messages that utilised positive and encouraging language, addressed individual needs and included a variety of content to assist smoking and then vaping cessation.

Discussions and Conclusions: Themes identified will directly add to evidence around the complexities of vaping and smoking cessation. The desire for encouraging language in messages, practical steps for NVP cessation, ongoing tailoring and resources about accessing NVPs are key to developing text message interventions for both smoking and NVP cessation.

Implications for Practice or Policy: The study uncovered in-depth knowledge of experiences using NVPs for smoking cessation and approaches to vaping cessation. These insights will inform the development of a text message intervention targeting both quitting smoking and vaping. Scalable interventions aimed at facilitating dual switching with NVPs for smoking cessation are needed, and if effective, can be embedded within existing quit smoking services.

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