

## **Cannabis vaping in Australia: a qualitative study of perceived health risks, access strategies and regulatory barriers**

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**Introduction:** Cannabis vaping is an emerging mode of cannabis consumption among young people, yet little is known about its use in countries with restrictive cannabis policies such as Australia. This qualitative study explores the motivations, perceptions, and policy-related experiences of young Australians who vape cannabis.

**Methods:** Twenty-four young adults (aged 18–30) who had vaped cannabis and used cannabis in the past 30 days, were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview. Participants were recruited via community engagement and social media. Interviews were analysed using content and reflexive thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes in motivations, perceived harms and benefits, and policy-related concerns.

**Results:** Participants reported various motivations for cannabis vaping, including medicinal use, recreational enjoyment, and functional purposes. Vaping was perceived as more discreet, convenient, and less harmful than smoking. However, concerns were raised about cannabis dependency, psychological side effects, and the safety of unregulated vape products. Social factors, particularly peer influence and device-sharing practices, played a significant role in the initiation and persistence of use. Few individuals discussed obtaining medicinal cannabis prescriptions strategically to access regulated products and avoid legal risks. On the other hand, several participants expressed concerns over the lack of oversight in medical practitioners prescribing medicinal cannabis with high potency to vulnerable populations. Additionally, participants expressed frustration with current cannabis and vaping regulations, particularly with the 2024 nicotine-vape ban in Australia, and advocated for improved harm-reduction-oriented policies.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** Cannabis vaping among young Australians is shaped by various personal, social, and regulatory policy factors. Current legislative frameworks in Australia may unintentionally limit access to safer vaping products and reinforce stigma on cannabis use.

**Implications for Practice or Policy:** Findings highlight the need for continuous research on the long-term effects of cannabis *vaping and improving our harm reduction regulatory policies on cannabis use.*

**Disclosure of Interest Statement:** *J.C., D.D. and B.C. is supported by The University of Queensland Living Stipend and Tuition Scholarship. G.C.K.C. is supported by an NHMRC Investigator Fellowship [GNT1176137]. NCYSUR is supported by Commonwealth funding from the Australian Government provided under the Drug and Alcohol Program. The funding bodies had no role in the study design, collection, analysis or interpretation of the data, writing the manuscript, or the decision to submit the paper for this presentation.*