

STEP-UP on vaping: what support do schools want to address adolescent vaping?

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Background: Vaping among adolescents is a growing public health concern associated with nicotine dependence, impaired academic performance, and other health related harms. School settings play a key role in influencing adolescent vaping behaviours, yet school staff consistently report barriers, including limited knowledge and resources. Despite these challenges, little is known about the specific supports schools would consider most helpful for strengthening their approach to student vaping.

Methods: A cross-sectional study of 128 Australian secondary school staff was conducted. School staff were invited to complete a survey to capture information on activities currently undertaken by staff to address vaping at their school, the perceived barriers and enablers for these activities and preferred strategies to help schools strengthen their approach to vaping.

Results: Preliminary descriptive analysis show that most school staff (n=120, 94%) reported performing at least one activity to address vaping at their school within the past 12 months, most frequently 'conducting informal conversations with students about vaping' (n=103, 80%). Nearly all respondents (n=126, 98%) reported encountering barriers to addressing vaping at their school. The most frequently reported strategies that staff would find helpful in supporting their schools approach to address student vaping were: 'professional development or training for staff' (n=66, 52%); 'assistance with involving students in vaping policy development and enforcement' (n=65, 51%); 'access to up-to-date research and evidence' (n=64, 50%); 'case studies and lessons learned from other schools' (n=62, 48%); and 'guidance for improving parental and community engagement (n=61, 48%)'.

Conclusions: Although many school staff are taking steps to address student vaping, their efforts are often constrained by barriers. These findings highlight that school staff would value receiving evidence-informed support that builds staff capacity, promotes student involvement, and enhances community partnerships. Tailored supports addressing these priorities may strengthen whole-school approaches to preventing and responding to adolescent vaping.

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