

# **Quitline counsellors' experiences of a clinical trial comparing efficacy of combination nicotine replacement therapy against nicotine vaping products for smoking cessation among clients of drug and alcohol services.**

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**Introduction:** Attitudes and experiences of Quitline counsellors regarding use of vaped nicotine products (VNP) compared to nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) for tobacco cessation among clients with alcohol and other drug (AOD) use disorders was explored.

**Method:** Qualitative focus groups were conducted among Quitline counsellors who were part of Project NEAT, a randomised clinical trial testing the efficacy of VNP and NRT for AOD clients across NSW, Victoria, and Queensland. Topics explored training, support provision, clients' responses, beliefs about effectiveness, and experiences with AOD clients. Data were analysed using NVivo software, following an inductive approach.

**Findings:** Twelve counsellors participated in two focus groups. Six major themes emerged: Attitudes to VNP, Behavioural strategies, Type of cessation aid, Communication and Participation in a Clinical Trial, and overall Role of Quitline. Findings indicated that counsellors were cautious about endorsing VNPs due to limited evidence, they recognised the importance of research and felt supported by study protocols. Behavioural strategies were seen as crucial, yet VNP use sometimes hindered discussions about behaviour change. Counsellors discussed preferences, benefits, and barriers and the importance of communication. They expressed positive views about participating in the clinical trial and believed in the role of Quitline for smoking cessation among AOD clients.

**Conclusion:** Results provide valuable insights into perspectives of Quitline counsellors experiences. Telephone support services can support people wanting to stop smoking using VNPs. Including Quitline as part of the active trial as well as the opportunity to evaluate and examine process is critical for future development and cessation strategies.

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