

# Perceptions of Australian general practitioners on e-cigarettes as smoking cessation aids: a qualitative study

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## BACKGROUND

A recent policy in October 2021 was introduced in Australia to limit a rapid increase in the number of e-cigarette users through regulation of nicotine containing e-liquid by accessing it only through prescription for the purpose of smoking cessation<sup>1</sup>.

This study aims to explore GP's perceptions about the role of e-cigarettes, and understand factors informing their prescribing intentions of nicotine e-liquid as part of a smoking cessation plan.

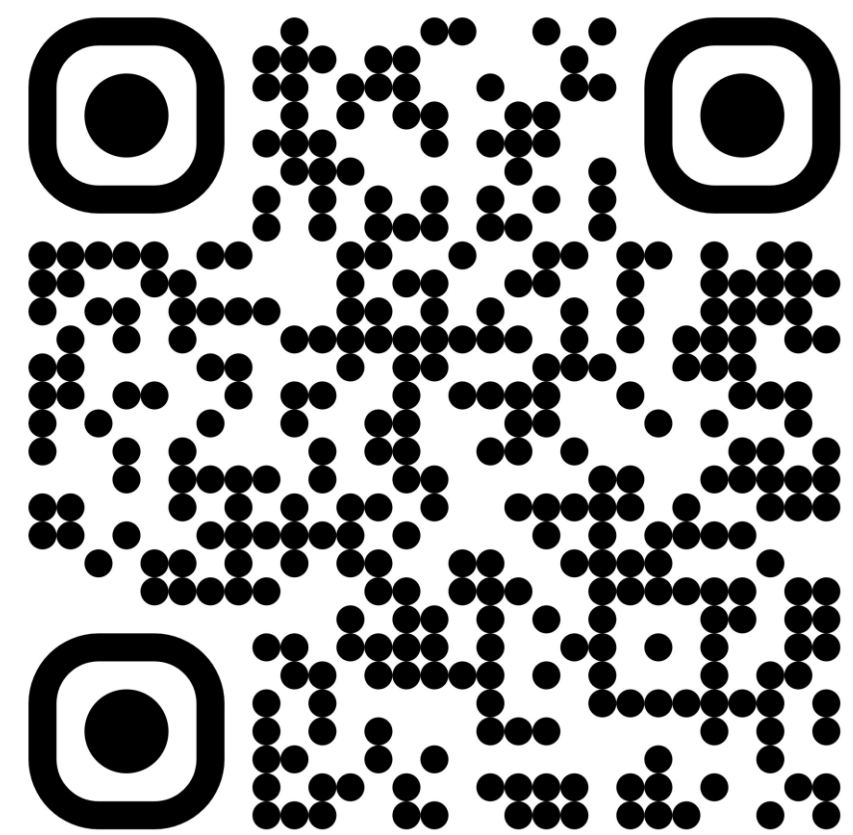
## METHODS

In-depth interviews were conducted and guided by a semi-structured interview guide.

Interviews with 13 GP's (F:7, M:6) were conducted online throughout May and June 2022 and lasted between 25 and 60 minutes.

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist.

Scan to  
view  
Preprint



E-pipe



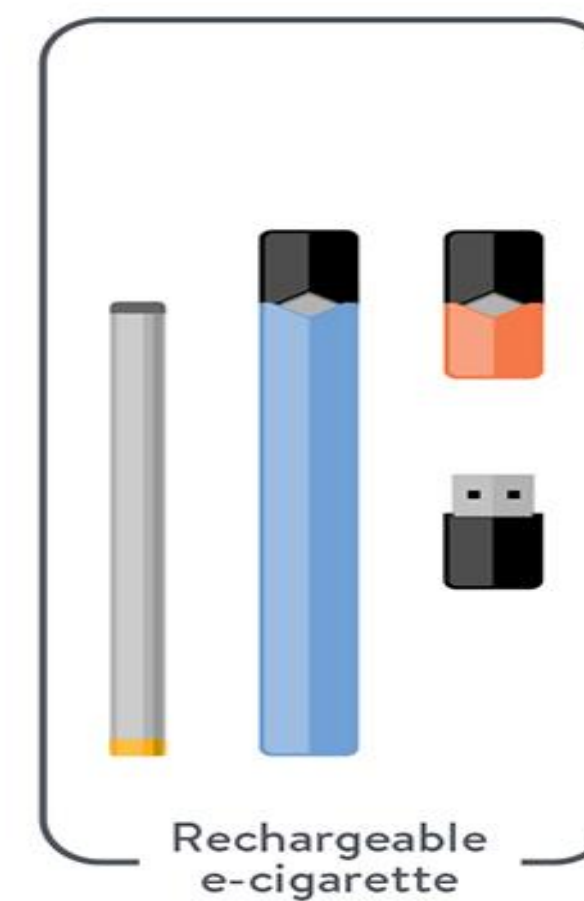
E-cigar



Large-size  
tank devices



Medium-size  
tank devices

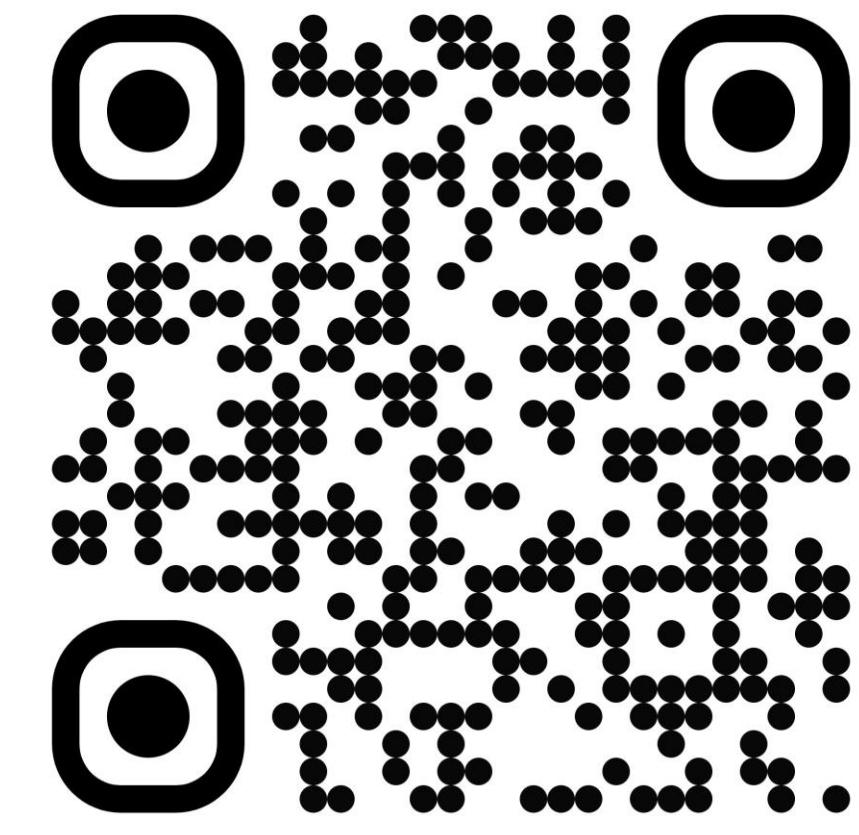


Rechargeable  
e-cigarette



Disposable  
e-cigarette

E-cigarette devices<sup>2</sup>



Scan to  
view  
Systematic  
Review

## RESULTS

### MAIN THEMES

Mixed perceptions on the safety of e-cigarettes in smoking cessation

Diverse views from GP's for recommending e-cigarettes to patients

Concerns of dual use and gateway effect to other tobacco products

GP's understanding of policy was limited

Lack of confidence and knowledge in prescribing e-cigarettes to patients

"It has the potential to become a window or a door to other products and a pathway to smoking". (GP#2, M, 6 years of practice)

**GP's held diverse views about prescribing nicotine e-liquids for smoking cessation. These were driven by limited information and understanding of current policy guidelines.**

**Clearer guidelines are required to enable GP's to provide advice to patients that wish to use e-cigarettes as smoking cessation aids.**

"As a last resort to my older patients who are desperate to quit and have failed using all other methods." (GP#4, F, 7 years of practice)

"I think I need more knowledge and training in this area. I probably would prescribe them more if I had that. I don't know enough about them." (GP#9 F, 4 years of practice)

"Concerns about harms and not knowing if e-cigarettes actually do help people stop smoking, to be worth recommending them to use." (GP#1, M, 46 years of practice)

## CONCLUSION

GP's had diverse views about e-cigarettes for smoking cessation. Concerns about safety and efficacy and limited understanding of current policy guidelines were strong influences on prescribing intentions.

GP's voiced concerns about the possibility of e-cigarettes being a gateway to smoking and other tobacco products.

Limited confidence to have discussions and answer patient questions about e-cigarettes arose from insufficient knowledge and concerns about the scientific evidence about e-cigarettes. Clearer guidance, which is easily accessible to GP's is required.

