

# 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 (VNPs) compared to nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) for tobacco cessation among clients with alcohol and other drug (AOD) use disorders was explored.

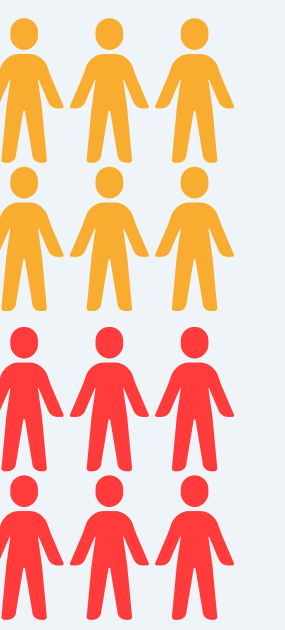
## METHOD

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.

"You know for some, it's their first time they've actually quit smoking [inpatient withdrawal program], so this is gold. You know they have a chance now. Even if they don't sustain it. Giving them an opportunity to link in to Quitline at this time, [is] so important." Participant 10.

## RESULTS

Twenty-three Quitline counsellors were involved in the NEAT trial. At the time of recruitment for the focus groups, eight of the counsellors had left Quitline. **Two on-line focus groups with six participants per group** were conducted on 18th October 2022.

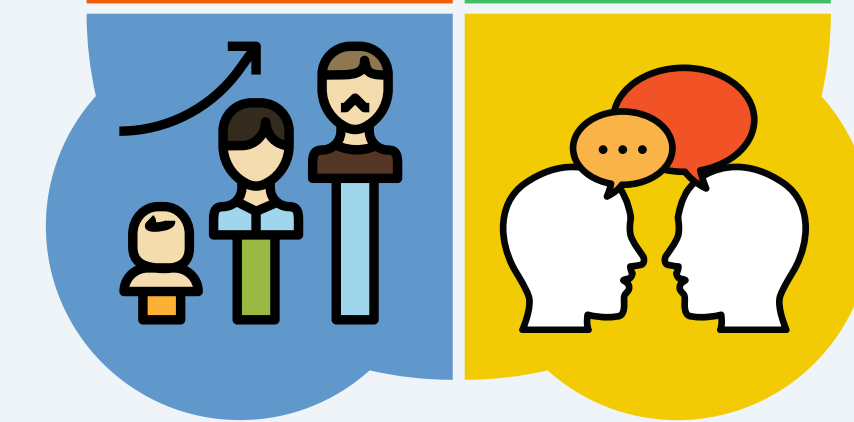


Of the twelve counsellors, **eight identified as female and four male.**



All counsellors reported being **employed part-time**

The **median age** of focus group participants **was 40 years** (range 36 to 63)



Median duration of **nine years as a Quitline counsellor** (range 1 to 19 years).

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.**

Human research ethics approval was granted by the Hunter New England Area Health (REGIS: 2019/ETH10554), University of Newcastle Human Research Ethics Committee (H-2019-0358), as well as Cancer Council Victoria Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC2001).