

Acknowledgements

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Participants' Experiences Accessing Nicotine Vaping Products for Smoking Cessation: Preliminary findings from the Understanding Vaping Study

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Overview of today's talk:

An overview of the recent history of Australia's vaping regulations

Some preliminary findings about how these regulations have impacted participants in our qualitative study

The Quit Smoking Study (NDARC, UNSW)

First participant randomised March 2021, final follow-up interview at 7 months, concluded March 2022.

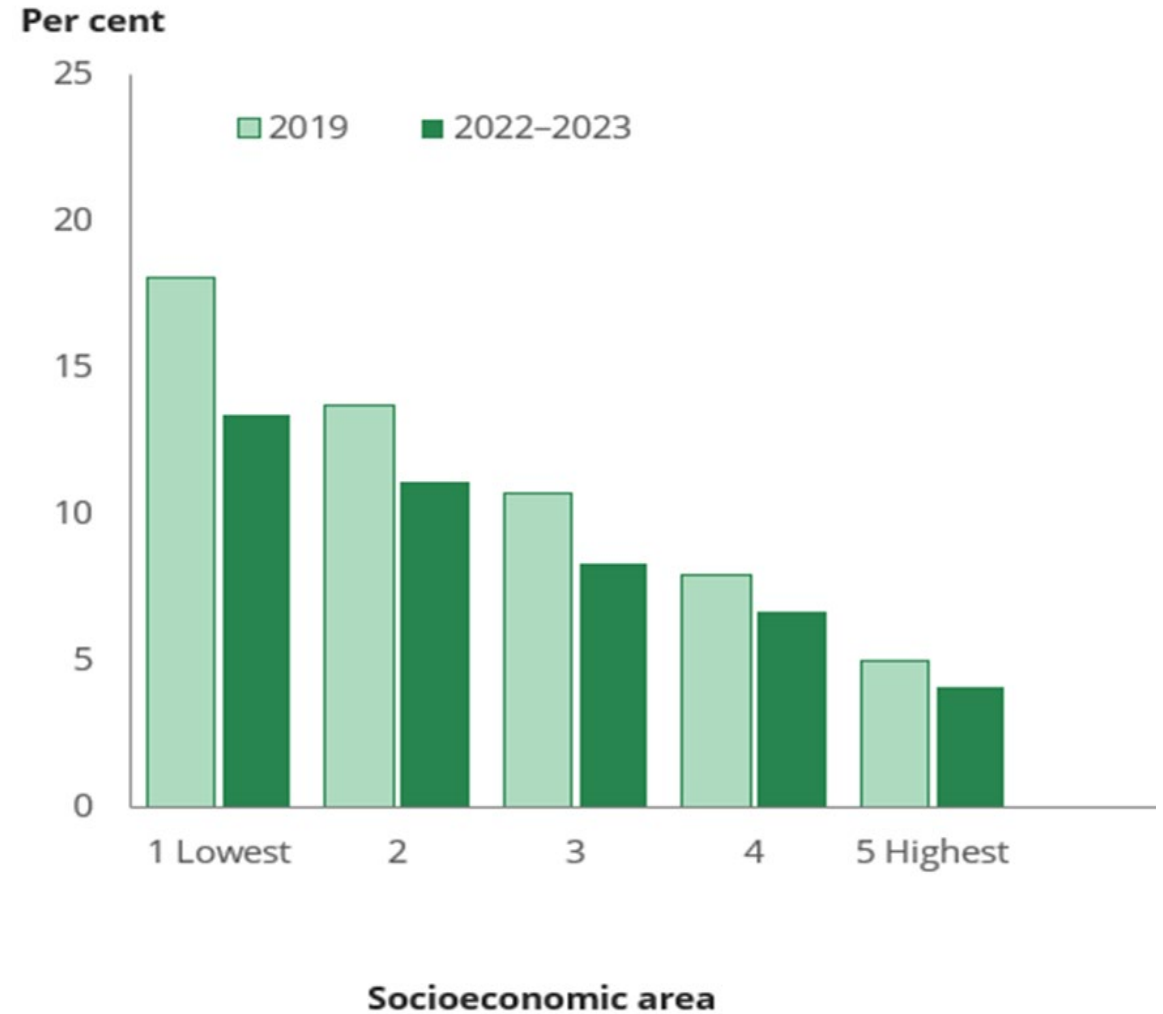
- **Inclusion criteria:**

- Experiencing social disadvantage—receiving at least one government pension or allowance at the time of enrollment.
- 18 years old or older
- Currently smoking and willing to make a quit attempt
- Willing to use oral NRT (Gum or Lozenge) or NVP
- Live within 150km of UNSW Sydney
- **19-month follow-up study: Nov 2022 – Nov 2023**

Smoking rates in Australia by socioeconomic



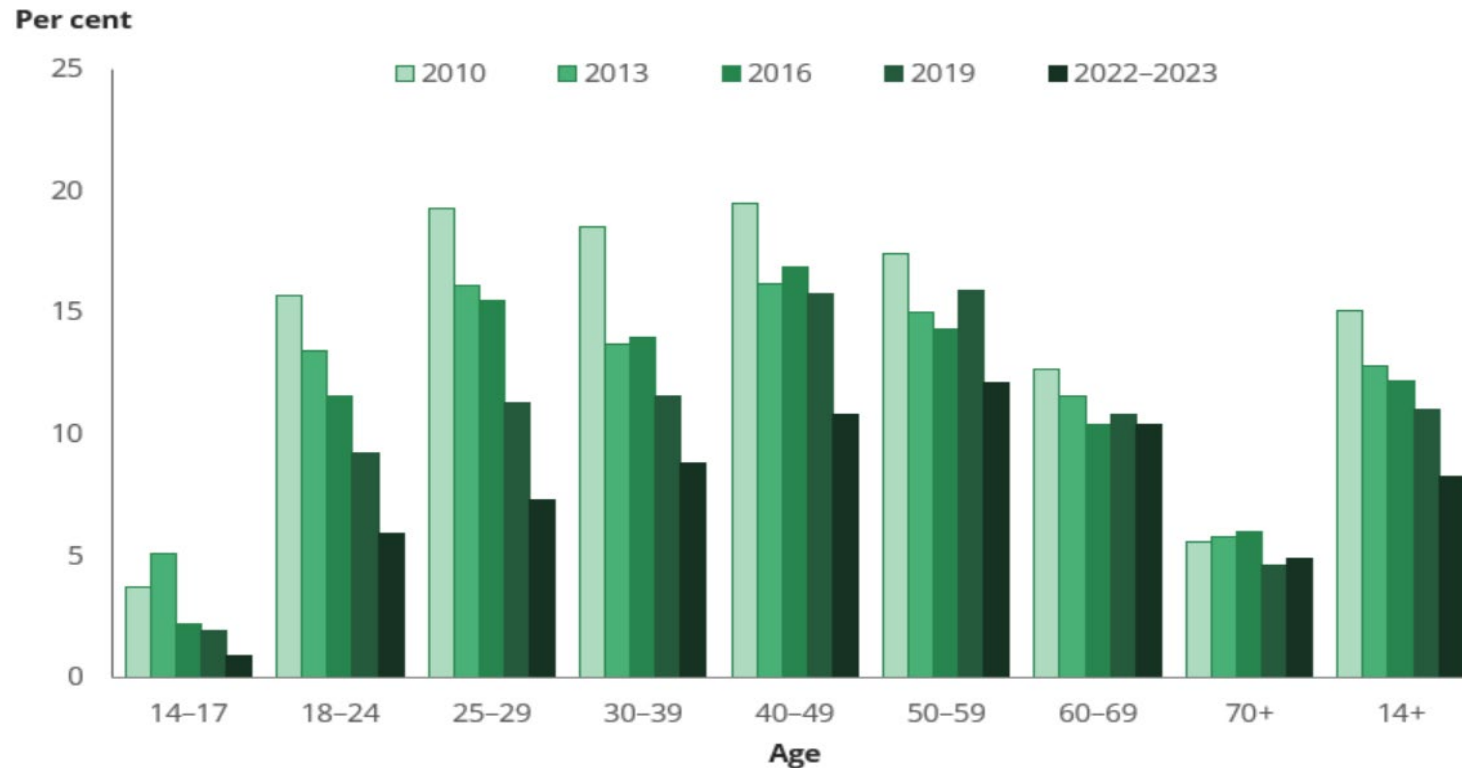
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Source: NDSHS 2022-2023

Smoking Rates in Australia by Age

Figure 11: Daily smoking by age, 2010 to 2022–2023



Source: NDSHS 2022–2023, Table 2.4.

Effectiveness of E-Cigarettes as Cessation Aid

Latest **Cochrane Review** (2024) found:

- High certainty evidence that nicotine vaping products (NVPs) increase quit rates when compared to nicotine replacement therapy (NRT)
- Moderate-certainty evidence that the rate of AEs is similar between groups

Cautionary caveats regarding vaping

While NVPs have been shown to be effective as quit tools, there is disagreement amongst policymakers and researchers about whether they are appropriate as quit tools.

1. Long-term health impacts of NVPs are unknown and data is scarce
2. WHO advice is to take a precautionary approach and limit use of NVPs.

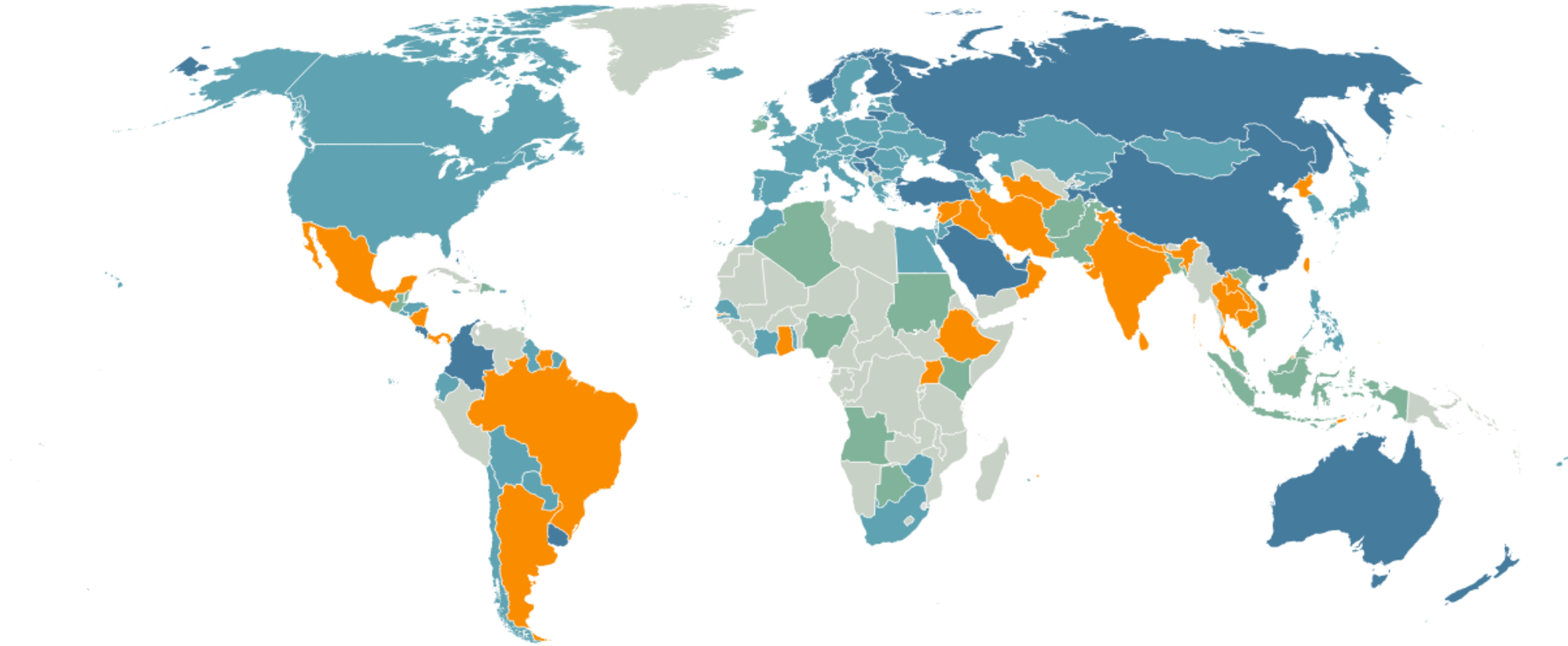
Things we can all agree on:

NVPs should not be used by non-smokers. At all.

NVPs should only be used as a tool for quitting smoking.

Map of vaping laws

Illegal Insufficient data or laws are not clear Legal with high restrictions Legal with light restrictions Legal with no restrictions



Source: MIST • Created with Datawrapper

Brief history of peak health bodies policies around NVPs in Australia

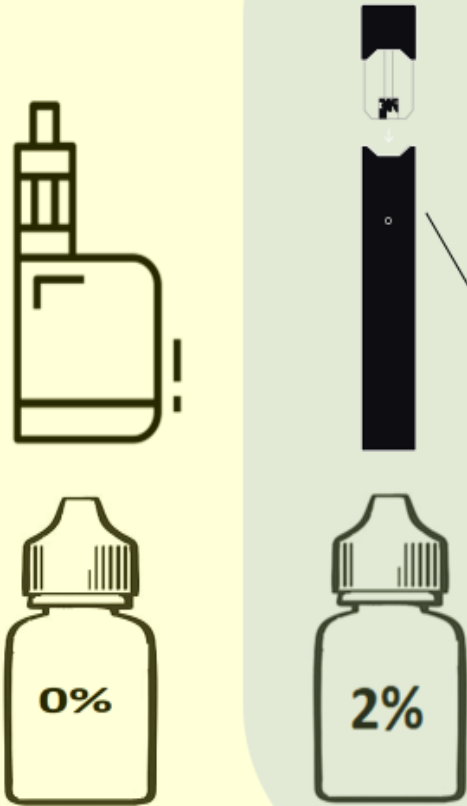
“Government policy supports the cessation of smoking rather than harm reduction” (National Drugs and Poisons Scheduling Committee, 2017).

- 2008: Nicotine (except in the form of cigarettes) was classified within the federal Poisons Standard.
- 2012 – 2024: "Personal Importation Scheme" - prescription required to import NVPs
- 2017 – Parliamentary Reviews – Precautionary vs Harm Reduction Approaches
- 2021 – Rescheduling of nicotine – Australian pharmacies may sell NVPs under TGO 110 standard

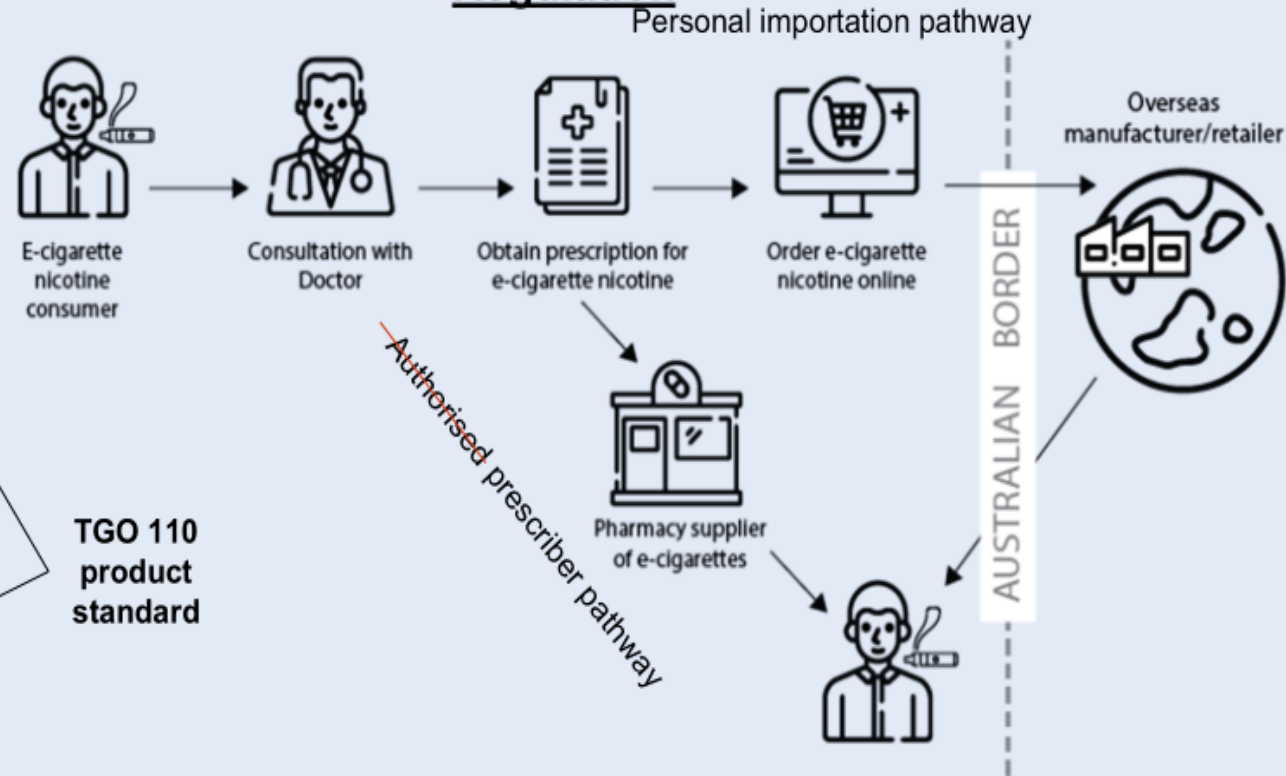
Personal Importation Scheme

Australian Regulation of Vaping Products

State/Territory Tobacco Control Laws



Federal and State/Territory Medicines Regulation



Acknowledgement: Prof Coral Gartner

Recent changes in vaping regulations in Australia

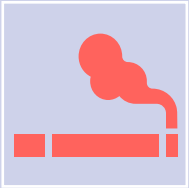


- 2019: Rise in youth vaping, "EVALI" outbreak in USA

- 2021: Special access scheme (SAS), Authorised prescribers (AP) programme

- In principle, **the proposed TGA changes would increase Australian smokers' access to nicotine e-cigarettes**. In practice, their impact was far more limited because medical and public health spokespersons discouraged patients from using them and doctors from prescribing them... A prominent former AMA president has said that he would never prescribe nicotine e-cigarettes for his patients because they **"actually get young people into smoking, rather than helping them get off it"** and the current president has argued that doctors should focus on getting smokers "off nicotine completely" (ie The Gateway Argument)

Precautionary Approach Views:



there is insufficient evidence that nicotine e-cigarettes are safe or effective in helping smokers to quit, and that they pose an unacceptable risk to youth

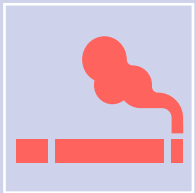


“**conclusive evidence**” of safety would justify a shift in policy, but it did not specify what would comprise “conclusive evidence” of safety. The Australian Medical Association implied that evidence of **zero risk** would be required.

Is Zero Risk Possible?



Most guidelines on the use of the precautionary principle reject the strong form that requires a product to be **100% safe** because **zero risk is impossible to achieve**. Regulations should be **proportional** to the risk the product poses. It could be argued that zero risk is not appropriate in a regulatory context when **consumers are freely able to use a widely-available product (tobacco) that is an established cause of very serious health harms**.



The majority of Australian tobacco control advocates support the sales ban on nicotine-containing e-cigarettes because **they believe that Australian policy should give priority to preventing smoking uptake among young people over any benefits to adults who smoke**.

All vapes are not equal

Disposable Vapes



Refillable Vape, Pod vape



2024 Regulation Change(s)

January 1, 2024 – Importation and sale of all disposable, single-use vapes banned, regardless of nicotine content.

March 1, 2024 – Personal Importation Scheme ends. No vaping products, regardless of nicotine content, allowed to be imported.

July 1, 2024 – Manufacture and sale of any vapes is banned, except approved (TGA110) products, which are only available from pharmacies (with prescription). Flavours limited to tobacco and mint/menthol

Oct 1, 2024 (ongoing): The only way to legally obtain vapes in Australia is from a pharmacy [brick & mortar or online] for the purpose of smoking cessation. For those over 18 years, a prescription is no longer required if accessing less than 20mg/ml concentration of nicotine. Flavours are limited to tobacco, and mint/menthol.

“Penalties under the legislation: Changes to the vaping laws in Australia are focused on protecting people from the harms of vaping and nicotine dependence. The law targets commercial and criminal supply of vapes. Individuals, including people under 18 years, who have a small amount of vapes/vaping products for personal use will not be targeted under the law.”
(Dept of Health & Aged Care Information document, Changes to vaping in Australia from 1 October 2024 Information for people who vape, 2024)

Changes in regulations for our qualitative study participants since they began the Quit Smoking Study:

The personal importation scheme was in effect when participants joined the study – participants were provided with a prescription valid for 12 months

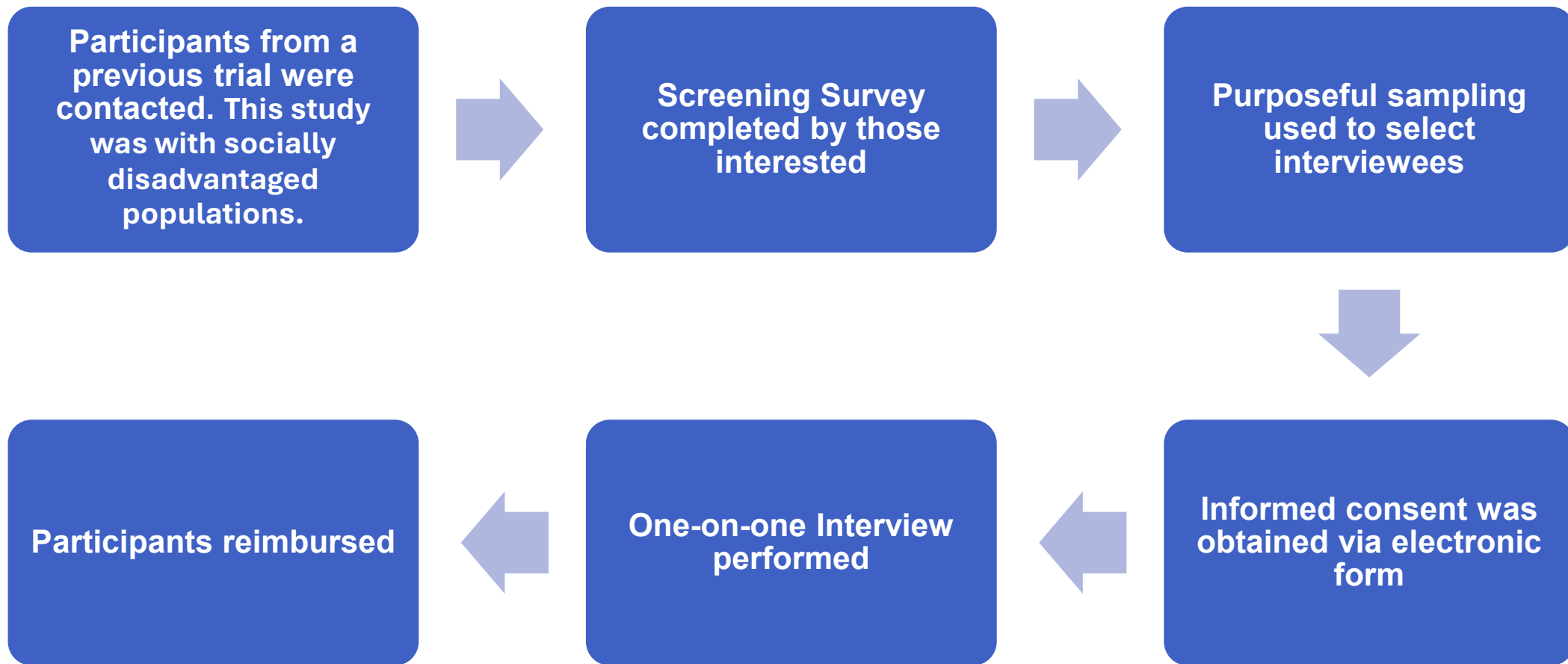
Participants who wanted a new prescription to import NVPs following the study had to find a doctor willing to issue a prescription

In **2024**, disposable vapes banned, importation banned, pharmacy model came into effect – supply issues

Participants reported accessing (compliant) NVPs via the prescription pathway as well as (non-compliant) disposable NVPs via various retail outlets.

How does Australia's regulatory framework work in practice for smokers wanting to use NVPs to quit smoking?

Recruitment



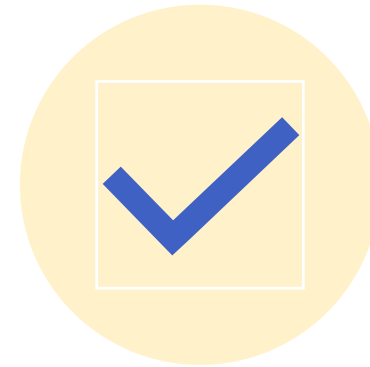
Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews



RAPPORT BUILDING



CONTEXTUAL RICHNESS



ADAPTABILITY

The Understanding Vaping Study



N=23 interviews
completed



Interview's spanned
approximately 60 minutes



Interviews were
predominantly on Zoom



Those unable to use
Zoom were given option
to do telephone interviews

Key themes emerging from interviews



INCREASED COST OF
ACCESS



FRUSTRATION OVER
CHANGING
REGULATIONS



FEELING CONFUSED
OR UNCERTAIN ABOUT
THEIR QUIT JOURNEY



RELAPSE TO SMOKING

Case Studies:

1. (Participant 525) – *An ex-smoker who still uses NVPs*

2. (Participant 355) – *Someone who quit and relapsed to smoking*

3. (Participant 813) – *An ex-smoker and ex-vaper (Dual Quit)*

Case 1: Participant 525 (Female, 43 years old).

Started smoking at the age of 14 and quit smoking with vaping products from the Quit Smoking Study



Experienced uncertainty and fear surrounding changes to personal importation scheme in 2024



Researched work around to receive desired products again

On feelings of frustration and disempowerment:

"...it was quite frustrating because it's like **I'm doing the right thing by having a prescription to have it sent to me**, but then the government's going, '**Nah, you're not allowed to do it anymore.**'"

...I've done the right thing by getting the scripts...I was angry and annoyed. **Because it's like us being treated like a child**"

- Participant 525.

Case 2: Participant 355 (Female, 67 years old):

Stopped smoking with vapes from the Quit Smoking Study



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graph TD; A[Stopped smoking with vapes from the Quit Smoking Study] --> B[Was caught off guard by sudden regulation change to personal importation scheme]; B --> C[Experienced traumatic and stressful life events]; C --> D[Relapsed to smoking];
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Was caught off guard by sudden regulation change to personal importation scheme

Experienced traumatic and stressful life events

Relapsed to smoking

There are challenges accessing vapes

"I got excited because it came up, I got an email from [vape vendor] and I thought oh this is great and I filled it out, filled out the order and then it says, **“Unfortunately, we are not allowed to send to Australia anymore.”**

"...**the chemist knew nothing about it** and the doctor that wrote us the prescription, they sent like a list of chemists to go to and **the chemist that was closest to us didn't know anything about it.**" - Participant 355

Returning to cigarettes

RESPONDENT

....but **the government stopped them** [vape vendor] from sending to Australia.

INTERVIEWER

And what did you think you would have to do after seeing that?

RESPONDENT

I'm smoking cigarettes again. More, more. Yes, more. I went I think about 16 months, 17 months without a cigarette.

Case 3: Participant 813 (Female, 39 years old)

Stopped smoking during the Quit Smoking Study



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graph TD; A[Stopped smoking during the Quit Smoking Study] --> B[Experienced small slip-up in quit journey]; B --> C[Recommends vaping for others who wish to quit smoking];
```

Experienced small slip-up in quit journey

Recommends vaping for others who wish to quit smoking

Transitioning is an important part of quitting

"For me, it was important to quit both [smoking and vaping]. I guess **the vape was ... a way of quitting, not a replacement.**"

"**So it was a tool.** It was never kind of like, 'I'm going to become a vaper instead of a smoker.'" - Participant 813

Preferences matter:

"[Vapes] should be easily available... they're going to buy the approved one over the dodgy one, right? ...it's the obvious place to go. But if you've got to, you know, **jump through hoops to get them in the chemist, you're not going to go.**"

"And if you've got to get the one that **tastes horrible, you're going to go to the tobacconist to get the fruity flavoured one** ... it's pretty and it tastes nice." -
Participant 813

Access to vapes is seen as urgent and potentially lifesaving:

"my cousin recently died from lung cancer, from smoking. His dad died from emphysema from smoking...**it was so hard to quit. I think if they both had access to vapes... they probably would have quit years ago before it was a problem...**he was smoking an hour before he died.

... it should be as easily accessible as patches or gum or any of the other alternatives that don't really work." -

Participant 813

Some other perspectives



NVP access and use should be monitored by professionals due to their potentially addictive nature.



Support systems and care networks are essential for quitting both smoking and vaping.



Our next step:
Text-Message
Interventions

**Co-Design Focus-
Groups**

Thank you for listening!

Contact us if you have further questions:

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