

Insights into youth vaping from focus groups and the development of the OurFutures Vaping Program

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Introduction: Rates of adolescent vaping have steadily increased in the last decade. Despite this, few studies have examined the reasons for and circumstances in which Australian adolescents use vapes. We conducted focus groups and surveys with Year 8 and Year 9 students to better understand vaping in their context and to co-design and user-test a school-based vaping prevention program, the OurFutures Vaping Program.

Methods: Year 8 (n=37, M_{age}=13.51, 54% female) and 9 students (N=34, M_{age}=14.85, 47% female) from three secondary schools participated in focus groups and surveys. The Year 9 survey comprised questions about vaping and tobacco smoking among people their age, including the prevalence, perceived harms, and reasons for and against use. Students then discussed realistic character profiles and storylines for the OurFutures Vaping program. With this information and adopting a harm minimisation and social influence approach, the research team developed a four-lesson script and worked with an illustrator to create a cartoon storyboard. User testing was then conducted via year 8 focus groups and surveys.

Results: Among Year 9 students, the leading reasons for e-cigarette use were peer pressure, curiosity, and stress relief. Key reasons against e-cigarette use were perceived harms, fear of addiction, and worries about it interfering with sporting ability. Students indicated vaping typically occurred at parties, in the park, and in the school toilets. Most (74%) students felt it was easy for someone their age to access vapes. On review of the final lesson, 100% of Year 8 students liked the cartoons, the storyline, and rated the lesson as good or very good; 91% of students liked the characters; and 86% of students felt the storyline was believable and realistic for people their age.

Discussion and Conclusion: These findings provide insight into adolescent vaping and support the acceptability of the OurFutures Vaping Program.

Implications for Practice or Policy: The OurFutures Vaping program is being evaluated in a large-scale cluster randomised controlled trial, if effective it can be scaled via the OurFutures platform (current reach >36,000 students).

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