

Media Release

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Australians overwhelmingly support action to protect young people from e-cigarettes

A new report from Cancer Council Victoria's Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer (CBRC) shows the vast majority of Australians (83%) overwhelmingly support action to regulate and enforce e-cigarettes to prevent a new generation from becoming addicted to nicotine. The report uses data from the Social Research Centre's probability-based panel, Life in Australia™.

"Unlawful over-the-counter availability of e-cigarettes is threatening to undo decades of public health success in Australia, particularly among young adults, with a recent ANU report¹ confirming most e-cigarette users are young people, who are both vaping and smoking. Most Australians seem to recognise this public health threat and want action to be taken now," warns Cancer Council Australia CEO, Professor Tanya Buchanan.

The CBRC report, commissioned by Cancer Council Australia and Quit, also showed three-quarters (76%) of 18–24-year-old Australians, the age group with the highest rate of e-cigarette use, and 70% of Australians overall, agree e-cigarettes are "highly addictive".

Professor Buchanan continued, noting the results show "very high" public support for Federal and state/territory governments to immediately intensify compliance and enforcement measures.

"The Federal government must act to stop the unlawful import of e-cigarettes at the border, and state and territory governments need to ensure they are cracking down hard on retailers who are openly and illegally selling nicotine e-cigarettes without a valid prescription," she added.

Head of Quit, Dr Sarah White, said "Manufacturers and retailers are deliberately mislabelling e-cigarettes, claiming they don't contain nicotine, to avoid getting caught importing or selling illicit e-cigarettes.

¹ Banks E, Yazidjoglou A, Brown S, Nguyen M, Martin M, Beckwith K, Daluwatta A, Campbell S, Joshy G. Summary Brief: Review of Global Evidence on the Health Effects of Electronic Cigarettes. Report for the Australian Department of Health. National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, Canberra: April 2022. Available from: <https://nceph.anu.edu.au/files/E-cigarettes%20health%20outcomes%20review%20summary%20brief%202022.pdf>

“This means many people try e-cigarettes thinking, wrongly, they’re not going to get addicted to them. We also know that e-cigarette use triples the risk of smoking uptake in never-smokers and non-smokers.

“Let’s be clear though; e-cigarettes are inherently harmful, whether they have nicotine in them or not, because users are inhaling toxic chemicals, heavy metals and fine particles deep into their lungs. They simply should not be available as consumer products and must only be available via the prescription pathway for smoking cessation. This would make it much easier to enforce laws designed to protect all Australians from companies seeking to profit from selling them harmful e-cigarettes,” she concluded.

For more information about Quit Victoria and Cancer Council’s calls for government action, visit www.quit.org.au and www.cancer.org.au.

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CBRC Report

Data were collected Australia-wide through the 53rd wave of the Social Research Centre’s probability-based panel, Life in Australia™. This wave had questions added on behalf of the Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer at Cancer Council Victoria to examine perceptions towards e-cigarettes.

Agreement with the statements that e-cigarettes are “highly addictive” and “should be regulated to stop a new generation of Australians from becoming addicted to nicotine” was consistent across all states and the Australian Capital Territory, and did not differ with region, male and female gender, education, or country of birth.