Positive Choices
Drug and Alcohol Information
Get informed, stay smart, stay safe

Getting the full story: a case study of vaping in the news

Introduction

The media strongly shapes debates and discussions about health topics. As parents and school staff are a key source of information for young people, they play an important role in developing their understanding of these topics. By acknowledging the influence of news media, parents and school staff can stay informed and provide accurate information to young people.

Vaping has been in the media again lately, including stories about how these products are being sold illegally. In this blog post, we look at how the news has covered vaping in the past, and how this can shape our understanding of the topic. We also share strategies and resources for parents and school staff to help young people stay informed about health topics.

Why and how have the vaping laws changed?

According to the 2022/23 Australian Secondary School's Student Survey, around one third of students (30%) had used an e-cigarette at least once in their lifetime. Around 5% of students vaped regularly (vaping on 20 or more days in the past month).

In response to concerns about e-cigarette use, particularly by young people, the Australian Government have introduced various vaping laws. In July 2024, the sale of non-therapeutic e-cigarettes (i.e., those not intended to help someone manage nicotine dependence) and disposable e-cigarettes was banned. Therapeutic e-cigarettes that met TGA regulatory requirements were available from a pharmacy with a prescription. Since October 2024, therapeutic e-cigarettes with a nicotine concentration of 20 mg/mL or less can be purchased from participating pharmacies by people aged over 18 years old without a prescription. It is illegal to sell e-cigarettes to someone under 18 years of age, unless they have been prescribed to quit smoking. Additional changes to product standards have been implemented in 2025, including maximum volumes and labelling requirements.

The 'E-cigarettes, vaping and the law' factsheet provides a summary of current laws.

Case Study: What did the news say about these laws?

To explore the role of media in shaping public perceptions, we conducted a case study focused on the July 1, 2024, reforms, which prompted significant media coverage. We analysed news stories from five days on either side of this date, examining 8 stories in total. To guide this examination, we used content analysis methodology adapted from Wackowski et al. 2018 to identify the main topics and subtopics.

Main and sub-topics:

Most articles focused on the new regulations and shift in e-cigarette sales from tobacconists to pharmacies. Articles also spoke about health effects of vaping, illegal e-cigarette sales, and smoking cessation. Information on how these laws would affect young people were largely missing from these articles. This was important context, given the impact on young people was a major reason the reforms were introduced. The broader implications and challenges of e-cigarettes and their regulation were also rarely explored.

Who was quoted?

We found that politicians were the most quoted sources in these news stories, followed by pharmacy industry representatives. In contrast, health experts and researchers were rarely mentioned in these articles. Evidence-based sources, defined as reliable and verified information grounded in research, data and expert knowledge, were rarely cited.

Tone:

Articles were mostly classified as having a negative tone, such as 'local chemists left in the dark over vaping changes'. The tone of the article can make it difficult to figure out what is fact based and what is the author's opinion.

What this means for parents and school staff:

News coverage may prioritise single aspects of an issue rather than the broader implications. Seeking out different sources of information, such as updates from government health websites and interviews with experts, can provide a more comprehensive understanding of health information and reforms. Media tactics used to keep readers engaged, such as sensationalist language, can also lead to excessive or inflated concern. Reading multiple sources can help people get more information for a more balanced view.

Thinking critically about the news: Practical strategies to discuss with young people

There are practical strategies that can help individuals to think critically about the news. Parents and school staff can use these strategies to help support critical thinking skills in young people.

- When reading a news story, think about what the main topic is. Are there any questions you have about the topic that haven't been answered?
- Look for more information about these questions from credible sources. Try to find information from an expert or trusted organisation.
- It can be hard to know if you are getting all the facts when reading a news article. Try other credible sources such as government and research institution websites to make sure you are getting the full story. There's a list below to help get you started.
- The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care have a free guide to help you find good health information online.
- Try to read beyond the headline and lead Otherwise, you might not get the whole story.
- It is important to ask, 'Who is quoted in the story?', 'Why are they quoted?', and 'Are other voices missing?'.

The Investigating Advertising Tactics: Class Activity includes a student worksheet that teachers can use as a basis for discussions about advertising.

Further resources

Further resources

E-cigarette resources

To find out more about the health harms of vaping visit:

- Factsheet: Electronic Cigarettes and Vaping
- Factsheet: Tobacco & Cigarettes
- Webinar: E-cigarettes and vaping in young people – where to from here?
- Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care: Vaping resources for parents and carers

News media and critical thinking resources

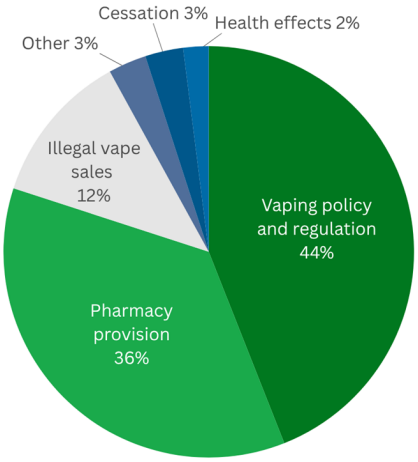
To learn more about the role of the media and for practical resources to support you and your child visit:

- Factsheet - Media and marketing's influence on drug and alcohol use
- ReachOut Australia - The news and critical thinking: Why is it important?
- Alannah & Madeline Foundation - Understanding Media Literacy – a guide for parents
- Victorian Parents Council - Teaching critical thinking to sort the fake news from the consumable content

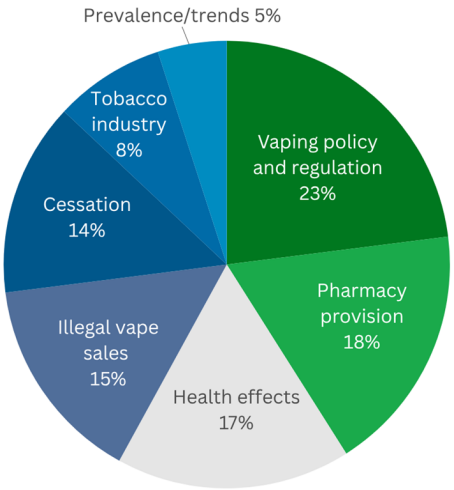
This blog post was developed by Rachael Sinclair and the Positive Choices team.

Detailed results

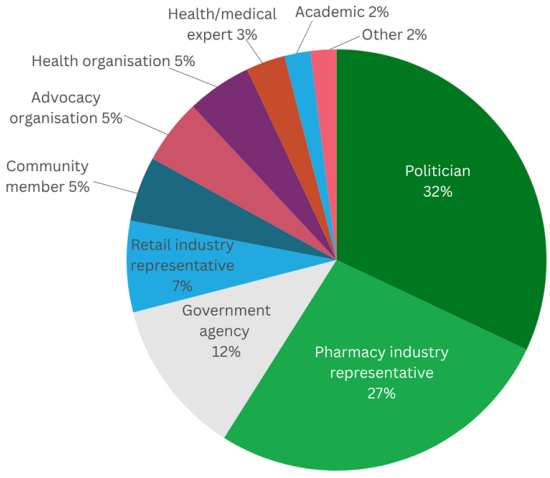
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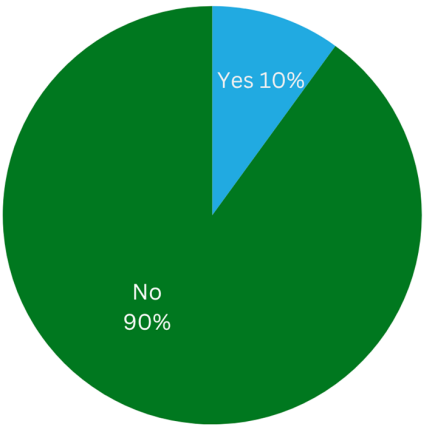
Sub-topics of included articles



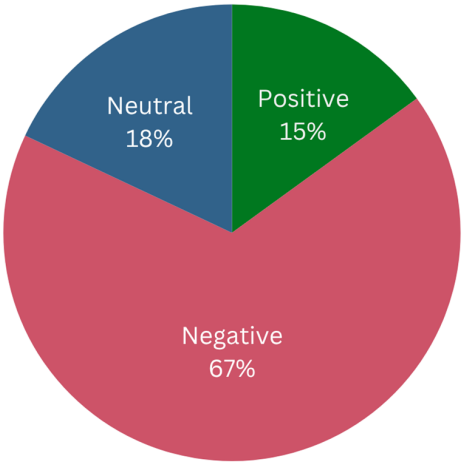
Who was quoted?



Use of evidence-based sources



Tone



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