

NORTH COAST YOUTH VAPING TASKFORCE

COMMUNIQUE 01 - DEC 2022



Welcome to the first communique for the North Coast (NC) Youth Vaping Taskforce.

Background

E-cigarettes (vapes) have become increasingly popular among Australians since the early 2000s. In recent years the uptake of vaping has flowed over to our most vulnerable, particularly young people (under 18). NSW's Mid and North Coast regional communities have reported a significant escalation in youth vaping, particularly in our school settings.

The NSW Chief Health Officer has identified reducing the harms of e-cigarettes as a key priority for NSW Health.

In mid-2022 Mid North Coast Local Health District (MNCLHD) Health Promotion partnered with North Coast Population Public Health and Northern NSW Local Health District (NNSWLHD) Health Promotion to take a coordinated and community-informed approach to initiate action to protect young people from the harms of e-cigarettes.

Regular taskforce communiques will be developed to share information and update the community on the progress of the North Coast Youth Vaping Taskforce.

Evidence on health impacts

A 2022 Australian National University [global evidence report](#) found that e-cigarette use can be harmful to health, particularly for non-smokers and youth.

- Nicotine is highly addictive and exposure in adolescents can change the structure and function of the brain
- Vaping-related injuries include poisoning, seizures, burns and lung disease
- Vaping is a gateway to smoking with non-smokers who vape being three times as likely to take up regular smoking
- There is limited evidence that e-cigarettes containing nicotine help people quit smoking.

Ref: Summary brief: review of global evidence on the health effects of electronic cigarettes (April 2022)

Why do youth vape?

- In Australia it is illegal to advertise or promote vapes and to sell them to people under 18 years old
- Social media is both an information source and a means of exposure to e-cigarette advertising
- Flavours that give off the perception of sweetness (such as candy or fruit) may make buying and trying e-cigarettes more appealing among young people.

Ref: The Alcohol and Drug Foundation - Alcohol and Drug Foundation (adf.org.au)

Why create a Regional Taskforce?

- Bring together key partners from diverse branches and positions to share knowledge, facilitate the development of ideas and build community capacity to respond to youth vaping
- Create a forum for advocacy and regional leadership
- Support development of and provide strategic advice to North Coast Youth Vaping Working Groups
- Support regulation and compliance in relation to the sale and distribution of vaping devices.

Taskforce members

Taskforce membership includes representation from:

- MNCLHD Health Promotion
- North Coast Population Public Health
- NNSWLHD Health Promotion
- Ministry of Health
- NSW Police
- Department of Education
- Catholic Diocese of Lismore
- Many Rivers Alliance
- Department of Regional NSW
- Healthy North Coast (PHN).

Taskforce aim

To take a collaborative and community-informed approach to protect young people, under 18 years of age on the NSW Mid and North Coast, from the harms of e-cigarettes.

NORTH COAST YOUTH VAPING TASKFORCE

Milestones and timeline

From August 2022

Consultation

- Consult with community, education, youth, parents, government and non-government organisations
- Review themes and collate.

Establish Taskforce

- Identify key partners and governance structure
- Identify appropriate youth networks to update regularly
- Hold inaugural meeting.

Communication Hub

- Develop communication plan
- Website hub with up-to-date evidence-based information, resources and webinars
- Youth and parent surveys available
- Project communiques.

2023

Establish North Coast and Mid North Coast Working Group

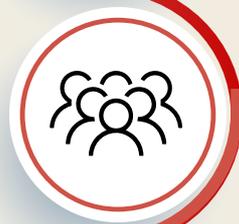
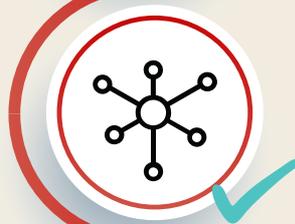
- Identify key stakeholders to join working group, including youth representatives
- Develop local actions to address key priorities identified by members.

Youth Vaping Forum

- Present consultation findings to a forum of key stakeholders and identify opportunities for collaboration, implementation, gaps in knowledge and community needs.
- Co-design initiatives with youth to empower young people to make positive decisions about their health.

Regional Action Plan

- Develop a Regional Action Plan to coordinate collaborative actions to reduce uptake and the harms of youth vaping.



Update

North Coast community consultation

Consultation sessions have been held with schools, young people and key agencies to understand the current situation, the local need, knowledge and perceptions of youth vaping in our communities.

Initial findings include:

- Community lacks awareness of, and is confused about, e-cigarette usage laws and regulations and where to report incidents
- There is mixed understanding in community about the risks and associated harm from vaping
- Vaping is seen as being 'safer' than smoking and is becoming embedded in youth culture
- Most young people who take up vaping are not smokers
- Schools are concerned with student attendance, acute illness, impacts on learning and behaviour and safety concerns related to purchasing vapes online and in the community
- Many schools feel unequipped to provide vaping cessation support and counseling to students
- There is a lack of evidence and a gap in treatment pathways to support young people experiencing nicotine addiction and looking to quit vaping

Inaugural Taskforce meeting

The first Taskforce meeting was held on 25/11/22 and key information shared included:

- One in three young people (16-24 yrs) use e-cigarettes (NSW Population Health Survey 2022)
- Most vapes contain nicotine, few don't
- There are immediate risks of harm from nicotine, flavour chemicals and mixing of chemicals
- The long-term risks of inhaling additives are unknown
- Vaping products are illegal for use under the age of 18 years
- Enforcement efforts target retail sale offences. There is no possession offence for nicotine products
- Regulatory activities need to include harm reduction consideration and mindset
- NSW Health *Do you know what your vaping* social media campaign and a Vaping Resource Toolkit have been released to provide facts and address vaping myths.

Communication Hub:

- A Youth Vaping communication hub is now available on MNCLHD website
- Find links to evidence-based information, webinars and resources
- Regular Taskforce updates will be available.

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