

# Researcher calls for total elimination of direct sales of vaping products in Australia

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All sales of vaping products other than those prescribed by a doctor to aid in quitting smoking should be stopped to curb skyrocketing uptake of e-cigarettes in young people, according to a leading tobacco control

expert.

In a perspective published in *Public Health Research & Practice*, Associate Professor Becky Freeman says predatory retailers, manufacturers and importers of vaping products have exploited loopholes in regulations to flood the market with illicit products that appeal to [young people](#).

In theory, Australia's regulatory model should be effective in protecting young people from taking up vaping since a prescription from a medical practitioner is now required to access nicotine-containing products, which must only be used as an aid to quit smoking.

However, Associate Professor Freeman of the University of Sydney's School of Public Health and Charles Perkins Centre says in practice manufacturers continue to import and sell vaping products that contain nicotine by simply failing to label them as containing nicotine or falsely claiming they are nicotine-free.

"Distinguishing between a legal non-nicotine vaping product and an illegal nicotine-containing device requires laboratory testing, which hampers effective enforcement of the regulations," she writes.

"Stopping the importation of all vaping products into Australia, regardless of nicotine content, unless bound for a pharmacy, would simplify and increase the effectiveness of enforcement and stop the flood of illicit products. This would also end young people's easy access to vaping products."

A [recent survey](#) showed that about one-third of Australian teens aged 14-17 have vaped at some time, while previous research has found that vaping can cause harms such as poisoning, burns, addiction and lung injury.

Dr. Freeman writes that Australia has fallen behind in [tobacco control](#) since the landmark plain packaging reforms of over a decade ago. Public health action has been understandably focused on the COVID-19 pandemic in recent years, which has led to stalled momentum in chronic disease prevention. Tobacco, alcohol, gambling and fast food industry players have been quick to seize the opportunity to exploit this lack of focus, she says.

"The Australian Government has been caught off guard by an aggressive industry that seeks to undo decades of effective tobacco control," she writes.

But she also acknowledges the good news that "after 10 years of minimal action", new measures and initiatives are in the pipeline to reduce smoking, which remains the single most important preventable cause of ill health and death in Australia.

In November 2022, the Federal Government announced it would reignite the fight against tobacco addiction with a package of new measures. Although these have yet to be put to the Australian Parliament, they are expected to include updated graphic warnings on [tobacco](#) products; prevention of the use of additives such as flavors and menthol; and a requirement for [tobacco companies](#) to be transparent about their sales volumes, pricing, product ingredients and emissions, as well as their advertising, promotion and sponsorship activities.

A new National Tobacco Strategy with ambitious targets for reducing smoking rates was recently endorsed by health ministers, while the Therapeutic Goods Administration recently launched a consultation on potential reforms to prevent children and adolescents from accessing [vaping](#) products.

**More information:** Becky Freeman, Reigniting tobacco control:

returning Australia to the front of the pack, *Public Health Research & Practice* (2023). [DOI: 10.17061/phrp3312304](https://doi.org/10.17061/phrp3312304)

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