

Study supports government initiative to give free vapes to disadvantaged people who want to quit smoking

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A government scheme to give out free vapes to smokers appeals to most but not all, according to new research from the University of East Anglia

(UEA).

The "Swap-to-Stop" scheme was announced earlier in 2023—providing a million e-cigarettes to disadvantaged people who smoke.

A new study supports the scheme, with people who vape saying that this type of approach might have helped them if it had been available when they attempted to quit. "Medicalisation of Vaping in the UK? E-cigarette users' perspectives on the merging of commercial and medical routes to vaping," was published in the journal *Perspectives in Public Health*.

But the research also shows that accessing vapes via the NHS might not be appealing to everyone, because some people don't see e-cigarettes as treatments but more as [consumer products](#) that they can shop for themselves.

The team says there is a place for both commercial and medical routes to vaping for quitting [smoking](#) to satisfy people's personal preferences.

Lead researcher Dr. Emma Ward, from UEA's Norwich Medical School, said, "The vast majority of people who have quit smoking via vaping will have done so without any [support](#) from health care professionals.

"However, using vapes to quit smoking has been supported by the NHS and there are guidelines for health care professionals to support patients looking to quit smoking with vaping.

"In April 2023, the [government](#) announced a "Swap-to-Stop" scheme—to help achieve its Smokefree 2030 target of less than 5 percent of people smoking in England by 2030.

"The scheme will be the biggest government supported stop smoking scheme to date using e-cigarettes. The scheme will use vaping products

that are also available to buy commercially.

"We wanted to better-understand how well it might work."

The team interviewed 136 people from across the UK—nearly all of whom had quit smoking via vaping.

They asked them how helpful they would have found e-cigarettes being provided by the NHS when they were attempting to quit. They also asked for their views on different ways to access vaping for quitting smoking.

Dr. Ward said, "Our research shows that people who quit smoking using commercially purchased vapes believe they might have benefitted from the NHS providing e-cigarettes and support if it had been available to them when they were quitting.

"Vaping being available via health care professionals offers reassurance around the effectiveness of e-cigarettes in helping people quit smoking and potential harms.

"However, it is unlikely that one type of [e-cigarette](#) will suit everyone seeking to quit and our research highlights how important being able to choose vaping products in a commercial environment is for some quitters.

"People who vape believe they have benefited from being able to choose vaping products in shops to get the right mix of device and flavors to work best for them to help them to permanently stop smoking.

"Even those who do achieve success with vapes given to them by the NHS are likely to continue to use shops to buy ongoing vaping supplies.

"So, we argue that there is a place for both commercial and medical routes to [vaping](#) to help people stop smoking."

This research was carried out in collaboration with London South Bank University.

More information: Medicalisation of vaping in the UK? E-cigarette users' perspectives on the merging of commercial and medical routes to vaping. openresearch.lsbu.ac.uk/item/943zq

Provided by University of East Anglia

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