

Avoiding cloudy messaging: Vape prevention campaigns face challenges

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Vaping prevention health communication campaign example materials: (A) NSW Health campaign media and toolkit, adapted, Bastion agency; (B) Lung Foundation Australia campaign, adapted, Sabio agency and (C) US Food and Drug Administration campaign, adapted, FDA Resource Library. Credit: Health Promotion International

Flinders University researchers say that cohesive and collaborative action from preventive health communicators and organizations is needed to inform young people about the devastating harms of vaping.

"Despite awareness of the potential harms, recreational vaping is increasing among [younger people](#) with our South Australian participants seeing vaping as 'cleaner' and less harmful than cigarettes," says Flinders University's Dr. Joshua Trigg.

"We know that nicotine vapes are highly addictive and expose people to harmful chemicals, respiratory irritants, and toxic substances. In order to discourage [young people](#) from picking up a vape, we need to understand what messaging they will best respond to," says Dr. Trigg.

Vapes, or e-cigarettes, are lithium battery-powered devices that heat liquids containing solvents, nicotine, flavorings and other chemicals, [volatile compounds](#), and ultrafine particles into an aerosol that are inhaled into the lungs.

Flinders University researchers investigated the impact of different vaping prevention public [health](#) media campaigns among young South Australians aged 16–26 years to help determine what will work best in vaping risk messaging.

The research, "Vaping harms awareness messaging: exploring young South Australians' responses to vaping prevention [campaign](#) materials", is [published](#) in the journal *Health Promotion International*.

Participants of the study were shown example materials from three vaping prevention campaigns and resource sets: '[The Real Cost](#)', '[Do you know what you're vaping](#)' and '[Unveil what you inhale](#)' to assess whether they were easily understood, appropriate, relevant, credible and effective.

"We know that health communication campaigns are an established tool for emphasizing the dangers associated with vaping. By studying the impact of these campaigns more closely, we can improve future messaging to reduce and deter the use of vapes by young people," he says.

Those who do vape and those who don't, reacted in different ways to the campaigns. Those who didn't already vape responded better to explicit messaging and shock tactics about the [health risks](#) associated with vaping. Whereas those who already vaped responded better to information challenging the notion that vapes are healthier than smoking cigarettes.

"We found that young people are likely to engage more with campaigns that consider the real life experiences, social contexts, and negative consequences associated with vaping. These experiences drew more interest and were more thought provoking to young South Australians," Dr. Trigg says.

"Bright visual design elements that represented health and well-being drew the attention of both groups of young people, with participants reiterating the benefits of using online and media resources to deliver preventative media campaigns. Campaigns now tend to adopt a 'mobile first' design approach, to target their audiences where they consume media" he says.

"In future, it is important that vaping prevention messaging considers those who already vape and those who do not, and clearly address the potential dangers and side-effects of inhaling a combination of chemicals. Young people need to understand that nicotine [vaping](#) is not a risk-free alternative to smoking cigarettes," he adds.

More information: Joshua Trigg et al, Vaping harms awareness

messaging: exploring young South Australians' responses to vaping prevention campaign materials, *Health Promotion International* (2023).
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Provided by Flinders University

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