

Vast majority of vaping shops in WA are near schools or in poorer areas, researchers find

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Examples of vape stores and their advertising in Perth, Western Australia in

2023. Credit: *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* (2024). DOI: 10.1016/j.anzjph.2023.100118

New research shows that vape stores are densely located around schools and in disadvantaged areas. Public health experts say the alarming data reinforces the pressing need for the Federal Government's planned further regulation to protect children and vulnerable people.

The article, [published in the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health](#), identified 194 stores in Western Australia (WA) that sell e-cigarettes as a main source of business, mostly concentrated in the metropolitan area of Perth.

Researchers found that 88% of stores were located within one kilometer of a school, and that vape store density was nearly seven times higher in the most socio-economically disadvantaged areas than in the least disadvantaged areas.

Lead author Dr. Matthew Tuson, Research Fellow from The University of Notre Dame Australia, says that the study is the first of its kind in Australia to demonstrate that 'brick and mortar' vape stores are more concentrated in disadvantaged communities.

"We know from overseas studies that the [tobacco industry](#) often sets up shop in disadvantaged areas where they can prey on vulnerable populations, and we found the same pattern here with vape retailers.

"The proximity of vape stores to schools increases young people's access to vapes and exposure to marketing, ultimately normalizing e-cigarette use.

"While our study was conducted in WA, the density of vape retailers near schools and in disadvantaged communities is a problem we expect exists right across Australia."

Co-author Professor Lisa Wood, also from The University of Notre Dame, says that the research is timely as children across the country head back to school and the Australian Government prepares to further tighten [vaping](#) regulation in 2024.

"As children make their way back to school in the coming weeks, they will be commuting past vape stores that visibly market their wares."

"We know that parents, teachers, and students themselves are struggling with the vaping epidemic in Australia, and these data show that vape stores are commonly located within walking distance of schools."

The importation of disposable vapes, which are popular with children, ended on 1 January, but further Government reforms to tighten the regulation of sale, marketing and manufacturing of e-cigarettes are planned this year.

Adjunct Professor Terry Slevin, CEO, Public Health Association of Australia, says measures to close the remaining loopholes are urgently needed to stop the epidemic of young people vaping.

"There has been a rapid explosion of vaping retailers across the country over the last few years."

"We strongly support the vaping reforms announced by Health Minister Mark Butler. These reforms will ensure comprehensive controls on vapes across all levels of the supply chain. They target retailers—not people who are addicted to vaping. Those addicted smokers who have decided they need vapes to help them quit, will still be able to access them with a

prescription and with assistance from a health professional.

"We call on all state and federal Parliamentarians to side with public health professionals, schools and teachers and put the health of young people first, by supporting the full suite of proposed vaping reforms."

More information: Matthew Tuson et al, Vape stores in Western Australia: growth, proximity to schools and socio-economic gradient of density, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* (2024). DOI: [10.1016/j.anzjph.2023.100118](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.anzjph.2023.100118)

Provided by Public Health Association of Australia

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