

Community Affairs Legislation Committee
Inquiry into the Therapeutic Goods and Other Legislation Amendment (Vaping Reforms) Bill 2024 [Provisions]

Response to additional question on notice from Senator Louise Pratt to Professor Maree Teesson AC, The Matilda Centre, The University of Sydney.

6th May 2024

Would you support a referral pathway to doctors and school nurses for children and young people who are vaping, or have a suggestion for an alternative mechanism?

We would support a referral pathway to doctors and school nurses for children and young people who are regularly vaping. Regular or weekly vaping was observed in 6% of those aged 14-17 in a recent survey we undertook of more than 4200 students in schools in NSW, WA and Queensland (<https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2023/219/7/prevalence-patterns-use-and-socio-demographic-features-e-cigarette-use>). Unfortunately, there is currently no strong evidence based to guide a treatment response for e-cigarette dependence for children and young people and we strongly support the undertaking of research to address this gap in our knowledge. Care would also need to be taken that this is not a compulsory requirement and that the issue is treated as a health issue.

RACGP do have recommendations for young people quitting vaping: <https://www.racgp.org.au/getmedia/2f8ffac1-8751-41aa-906f-f0ec7fec7feca048/RACGP-NVP-and-Vaping-Cessation-Consultation-provisional-draft-Dec2023.pdf.aspx> -- this is detailed on **page 29** and confirms the weak evidence base. The recommendations are behavioural approaches that are currently available for young people, as well as confirming pharmacotherapy support for vaping cessation can be considered from 12 years of age, with NRT being the preferred option (again the evidence here is all from smoking cessation).

There is also this very recent article published in RACGP's journal 'Australian Journal of General Practice' which summarises the literature on e-cigarette cessation for 12-25 year olds: <https://www1.racgp.org.au/ajgp/2024/may/assisting-young-people-aged-12-25-years-to-cess-e>

For those who are not regularly using, or have not used e-cigarettes we strongly support an *alternative mechanism* of the implementation of the evidence based prevention programs OurFutures in the school PDHPE curriculum <https://ourfuturesinstitute.org.au>.

Community Affairs Legislation Committee - Vaping Reforms Bill 2024 Public Hearing, 1 May 2024 - Questions on Notice to Professor Maree Teesson

1. Proof Hansard, p. 67.

Senator STEELE-JOHN: What should be considered, in your view, in the implementation process of this proposal to maximise the efficiency of anti-advertisement measures? Particularly, do you have any observations around best practice use of social media campaigns to discourage drug use and what we can learn from those best practice examples as part of that implementation process?

Prof. Teesson: We're happy to take that on notice. I know we're at the end. We could provide you with some evidence and descriptions of some very positive social media campaigns that we've been working on at the Matilda Centre with influencers. There are some challenges there in terms of the costs and some of the complexity in engaging barriers to entry with those campaigns. Our youth advisory board has really strongly said that using social media platforms like TikTok is going to be incredibly important for engaging young people in positive messages. I could give you that—I know we're at the end of time.

Response to Question on Notice.

Positive Choices (www.positivechoices.org.au) is a national drug prevention portal that addresses a known gap in the implementation of evidence-based drug prevention in Australian schools. Developed in consultation and collaboration with teachers, parents and students, the portal provides centralised access to drug prevention resources, all of which have been developed or reviewed by drug and/or education experts, and meet the *Positive Choices* inclusion criteria for relevance, quality, and evidence basis. Since launch in December 2015, the site has been accessed by >3 million users nationally and internationally. The project is funded by the Australian Department of Health and Aged Care and led by a team of researchers at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of Sydney, in collaboration with researchers from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, the National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University, and Netfront (web design).

Positive Choices received funding from the PREMISE NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence to collaborate with the Matilda Centre Youth Advisory Board (YAB). E-cigarettes, which have emerged as a substance of concern among school communities in recent years, were identified as a priority area by the YAB. We co-designed a resource with YAB members and following their input we worked with an influencer to develop an innovative promotion campaign. The campaign aimed to promote both the co-designed factsheet and *Positive Choices' E-cigarettes & Vaping* landing page more broadly, and to reach a younger audience than previous promotions. The content focused on dispelling common myths and empowering young Australians to make informed choices. We hope the information below provides context and answers what can be learned in the implementation process.

Summary of campaign deliverables and results

After searching for appropriate talent to work with as part of this campaign, we engaged an Australian social media influencer. The influencer had built a strong, loyal following through her TikTok

account (228K+ followers at time of campaign) as well as her Instagram account (95K+ followers at time of campaign) through her daily vlogs and diverse content. Her followers are predominantly female (~79%), live in Australia (~58%), and are aged <24 years old (~68%)

this campaign produced the following four activities/deliverables:

1. A dedicated podcast episode (uploaded on 11th Aug 2023)
 - **RESULTS:** The podcast episode received over 3,300 downloads to date with 88% of listeners based in Australia.

2. A TikTok video post (shared on 5th Oct 2023)
 - **RESULTS:** The TikTok video post received over 76K views and 3,695 likes, was shared over 123 times and saved over 86 times to view later. It received over 52 comments which were overwhelmingly positive in sentiment (e.g., “It’s so important to know the truth about vaping!” and “Amazing that you are sharing this information that needs to be told more often!”).

3. An Instagram Story (shared on 5th Oct 2023)
 - **RESULTS:** Over 24K Instagram users viewed the Instagram Story, which received 156 likes and 433 link clicks visiting *Positive Choices* “E-cigarettes & Vaping” page. The Instagram Story was shared 24 times and received 15 replies.

4. Two-weeks usage rights to further promote the influencers video content via Positive Choices social media accounts (from 5th-19th Oct 2023)
 - **RESULTS:** On Facebook/Instagram, our video ad reached over 187K Facebook/Instagram users and received over 315K views. On TikTok, our video ad reached over 135K TikTok users and received over 312K views. Both campaigns generated 2,749 link clicks visiting *Positive Choices* “E-cigarettes & Vaping” page.

These combined campaign activities also resulted in 3,825 total users visiting *Positive Choices* E-cigarettes & Vaping landing page during October 2024, when most of our campaign activities went live. This was 4 times higher than the total number of users who had visited this page over the past 12 months.

These campaign activities also resulted in 5,953 total views of vaping-related content on Positive Choices website during October 2024. This was 4 times higher than our average monthly views of vaping-related content on *Positive Choices* website over the previous 12 months.

We also saw an increase in the percentage of website visitors aged 18-24 during October 2024 (41.7%) compared to the website’s overall percentage of website visitors aged 18-24 – 31.8%. Given that we are unable to view data on website visitors under the age of 18 years old due to privacy restrictions, 18-24 is the youngest age bracket we can observe data for.

These results suggest the campaign was effective in increasing our reach among younger audiences, relative to what we have historically seen.

Key strengths of the campaign

1. Aligned with Youth feedback

- When surveyed, the PREMISE Youth Advisory Board members (n = 6) reported that TikTok and Instagram were the best platforms to use to advertise to young people, and 83% thought it was important for us to engage social media influencers.
- In a follow-up survey, the YAB were impressed with the campaign and use of an influencer to reach young people.

2. Reaching a young audience

- *Positive Choices* has used social media to reach our target audience since launching in 2015 and has reached over 3.8 million site users to date.
- However, social media campaigns have been most successful with teachers and parents. Promotional campaigns targeting students have been less successful and have had higher cost per engagement compared to those targeting parents and teachers.
- The influencer campaign allowed us to reach a younger audience and had significantly lower cost per engagement than previous student-focused promotions. The proportion of young people visiting *Positive Choices* increased during the campaign.

3. Audience engagement

- The social media influencer we worked with had an established audience who were engaged with her content and appeared to view her as a trustworthy source of advice.