

31 October 2023

Committee Chair
Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety
Parliament of New South Wales

Submitted via Parliament of New South Wales website

Dear Committee Chair

Re: e-cigarette regulation and compliance in New South Wales

headspace appreciates the opportunity to provide input into the inquiry into e-cigarette regulation and compliance in New South Wales.

headspace is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation, providing early intervention mental health services to 12 to 25 year olds. headspace has 154 centres across Australia in metropolitan, regional and remote areas, and offers online and phone support services and digital resources through our website and through eheadspace. We provide support to young people across four domains: mental health, physical health, work and study, and alcohol and other drug (AOD) services. In relation to e-cigarette use, headspace services are guided to access clinical guidance and resources produced by Queensland's youth AOD agency, Dovetail.

headspace is concerned by the increasing prevalence of use of e-cigarettes by young people, including young people who are experiencing psychological distress or mental ill health. Increasingly, use among teenagers is becoming normalised – particularly as many young people and children can find e-cigarettes appealing.

Both national data and anecdotal experience indicates that a significant proportion of young people have tried vaping – and that the rate is increasing. For example, Orygen Youth Mental Health's analysis of data from the National Drug Strategy Household Survey indicates the proportion of young people aged 18 to 25 who had ever used e-cigarettes increased from 9 per cent in 2013 to 26 per cent in 2019.¹ More recent data shows even higher rates of use.²

Governments must adopt strong, evidence-based approaches to protect young people from the known harms associated with vaping and use of e-cigarettes (including both nicotine and non-nicotine vapes).

Any regulatory changes should incorporate appropriate lead time, as sudden restrictions of access can lead to challenges for young people, including nicotine withdrawal and the associated impacts. Public awareness of regulatory changes, and providing clinical guidance on preventing and ceasing use is also critical; a sudden loss of access to e-cigarettes without appropriate support could trigger other harmful or risk-taking substance use as an alternative, especially amongst young people experiencing mental health and wellbeing challenges.

¹ Orygen. (2023). *TGA public consultation on NVP reforms: Briefing document*, January 2023.

² Watts, C., Freeman, B., Egger, S. (2022). We asked over 700 teens where they bought their vapes. Here's what they said. *The Conversation*, 27 September.

Support for young people who may be trying or using e-cigarettes is also important, including improving literacy and enabling mental health workers to help young people address the underlying reasons for using e-cigarettes – such as peer pressure or to avoid psychological distress. headspace welcomes the NSW Government’s investment in supports designed for young people, including enhancements to iCanQuit and an online learning model for youth services.

Research by headspace and Orygen Youth Mental Health found almost a quarter of young people accessing primary mental health services smoke tobacco daily.³ This suggests youth mental health settings – including headspace centres – provide an opportunity for smoking and tobacco use prevention and early intervention, including the use of e-cigarettes.

There is also evidence that prescribed e-cigarette use can be appropriate for those with nicotine dependence. At the same time, there is limited research on the best interventions for vaping cessation among young people; most nicotine cessation programs and interventions are based on adult research.⁴ More research in this area will help identify the most effective interventions to address vaping among young people.

headspace would welcome the opportunity to discuss young people’s substance use and implications of increased regulation in more detail with the Committee.

Yours sincerely

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Chief Executive Officer

³ Cotton, S.M., Sharmin, S., Gao, C.X., Brown, E., et al. (2022). Prevalence and correlates of tobacco use in young people presenting to Australian primary mental health services, *Nicotine and Tobacco Research*, 25(4): 682-691.

⁴ Berg, C.J., Krishnan, N., Graham, A.L. & Abrams, L.C. (2021). A synthesis of the literature to inform vaping cessation interventions for young adults, *Addictive Behaviors*, August 2021.