

Inquiry into the Use of Electronic Cigarettes and Personal Vaporisers in Australia

To the members of the inquiry committee:

I urge the Australian Parliament to:

- Make nicotine legal for vaping for tobacco harm reduction. This involves exempting nicotine e-liquid from the 'Poisons Standard', applying for the same exemption as for nicotine in tobacco.
- Classify nicotine and vaping devices as consumer products.
- Introduce a proportionate regulatory approach for e-cigarettes and nicotine e-juice that reflects pragmatic action to help people to quit tobacco.

I am the founder and manager of Vape2Save, a Quit Tobacco and Financial Capability programme. I have worked in Tobacco Control and Stop Smoking treatment delivery for over ten years, here in New Zealand. I started Vape2Save in November 2015 after the release of the [Public Health England report, E-cigarette: evidence update, Aug 2015](#). This report provided me with enough evidence to step outside the New Zealand boundaries of traditional stop smoking treatment and try using e-cigarettes to help people to quit tobacco.

I am self-funded and receive no government funding.

Over 2015 - 2016, I was in development phase where I tested and modified the Vape2Save programme to ensure participants had the best source of information, support and access to quality e-cigarettes and e-juice with nicotine.

In New Zealand, the indigenous people Maori, represent a high prevalence of smoking tobacco than non-Maori; NZ Health Survey 2015-2016, current smokers, 15+, Maori Men 37.3% and Maori Women 39.7%,
2015 - 2016 Vape2Save groups have a significant representation of Maori, with 77% Maori (62), Pacific 19% (15), European 1 (1%), Other 2 (3%). E-cigarettes have shown to be an acceptable technology to quit tobacco especially for Maori Women with 90% (56) enrolled into Vape2Save groups over this period.

During the development phase of 2015 to 2016, I was the sole treatment delivery person. You can see from the following data what e-cigarettes can provide in terms quit outcomes:

- 2015 to 2016 - 80 participants enrolled in Vape2Save, 56 people quit (70% quit rate at four weeks post-quit).
- 2017 - 50 participants enrolled in Vape2Save, 48 quit (98% quit rate at four weeks post-quit).

I originally envisioned Vape2Save to function using stop smoking group-based treatment therapy and only focusing on quitting tobacco by using e-cigarettes. What I found over the year that e-cigarettes helped reduce the financial cost for the group participants by 95%, providing the opportunity for me to design a programme that includes both stop smoking group-based therapy and financial capability.

Many of the participants on Vape2Save were of low socio-economic status and experiencing financial hardship, in which purchasing tobacco was always the first item purchased before food or paying bills. Using e-cigarettes helped the participants to stop smoking and provided immediate financial relief.

Group members are spending between \$80 to \$120 per week (\$320 to \$480 per month) on tobacco. When they switch to vaping the cost to maintain their nicotine e-juice is up to a maximum of \$40 for a 30ml e-juice that can last up to 4 weeks.

Vape2Save provides financial capability support that focuses on debt reduction and financial saving goals.

Vape2Save provides information and discusses all stop smoking options including e-cigarettes to participants. The members can choose to use an e-cigarette or not and have the opportunity to use NRT or prescription stop smoking medicines (varenicline, nortriptyline or bupropion). All participants have expressed how they have previously tried many times to quit tobacco and have failed using NRT and prescription medicines and cold turkey. E-cigarettes are seen as their final option to try giving quitting another go.

Achieving quitting tobacco and switching to vaping has been a stressless process for group members. Participants are getting their nicotine dose from the e-juice without the combustible smoke, which does the most damage. The motivation once they realise e-cigarettes is working for them, increases their confidence and determination to keep going and not go back to smoking tobacco. Many have now helped their family members to do the same and stop smoking through using e-cigarettes or brought them to a Vape2Save group.

Vape2Save Champions who have shown interest in wanting to help others quit tobacco by using e-cigarettes are now being trained. It's the Indigenous Maori Women, who have come through my Vape2Save groups and are stepping up and volunteering their time to facilitate groups and helping others achieve the ultimate goal of finally quitting tobacco and moving towards financial wellness.

E-cigarettes with nicotine e-juice is showing great potential in helping many more people that have tried and tried to quit tobacco and have not been successful in quitting smoking. This is an opportunity that Australia should not ignore and embrace this technology of harm reduction.

Mauri ora,

Rebecca Ruwhiu-Collins
Vape2Save