



22 August 2023

The Honourable Kate Chaney MP  
Member for Curtin  
PO Box 186, Floreat, WA, 6014

Dear Ms Chaney

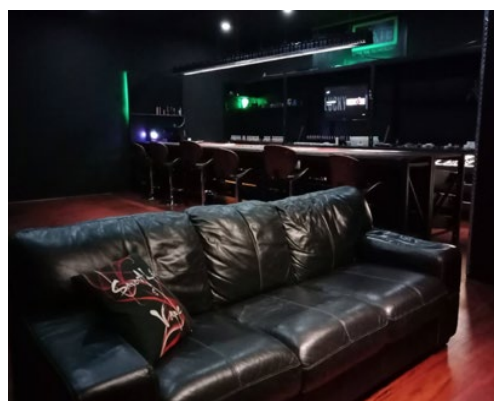
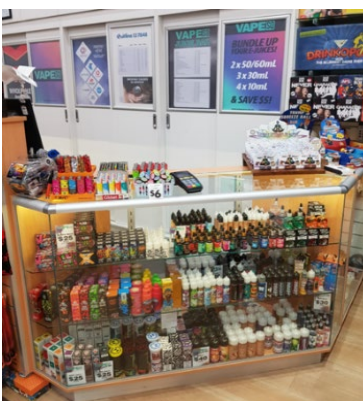
As a long-time resident of Subiaco, where my children attended Subiaco Primary, I am appalled by the opening of the tobacconist selling vapes that you have recently exposed on your social media and welcome your action in this area.

As a Professor of Population Health and Health Promotion at Curtin University, I lead a team researching vapes (e-cigarettes). Several of our projects have investigated how these products are sold in the bricks and mortar and online environment, and on social media, such as TikTok, Instagram and Twitter.

I will briefly summarise a small piece of our applied research into vaping, that may be of some use to you, as they are Western Australian and Australia-specific.

### **The emergence of e-cigarette retail shops in a regulated tobacco control environment [1]**

In 2020, we found there were 98 retailers selling vapes in the greater Perth metropolitan area: 43 tobacconists, 21 vape shops, 14 supermarkets, 12 service stations and 8 smoke shops. Vape shops differed from other retailers, having bar-style layouts, lounge areas and free e-liquid samples. The availability of e-cigarettes in bricks and mortar retail in Western Australia has increased, with vape shops extending their appeal through free trials, along with inviting bar and lounge-style shop fronts. The following photos show the sense of community that some of these retailers maintain.



You can access the publication here: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/hpja.657>



### **They're sleek, stylish and sexy': selling e-cigarettes online [2]**

In 2021, we found that a broad range of vaping products were readily available (disposable, pod-based, reusable, replacement parts) from Australian and New Zealand online e-cigarette retailers. All New Zealand and some Australian online retailers offered nicotine e-liquid. Most age verification procedures could be easily circumvented (e.g., tick a box to indicate being 18 years). There were frequent and unsubstantiated health and cessation claims made about e-cigarettes by retailers, such as, *'If you are vaping high quality tested liquids, then you can be puffing on ZERO carcinogens'* or *'They [vapes] are not at all traditional cigarettes, you'll be able to vape in most places prohibited to smokers.'*

You can access the publication here: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1326020022000139>

### **Promotion of e-cigarettes on TikTok and regulatory considerations [3]**

TikTok is one of the fastest-growing social media platforms, having [4] had 1.2 billion monthly active users in 2022 [5]. The platform is particularly popular among young people, with 43% of its users aged between 18 and 24 years old [6]. In 2022, TikTok acted on content that violated its policies, claiming to remove content that did not meet approved content posting criteria, including videos about products such as e-cigarettes [6]. Despite this, users are still routinely exposed to e-cigarette content on TikTok, and other social media platforms [7]. It seems that the current content policies to restrict tobacco promotion are insufficient and confusing [8].

Of the 264 e-cigarette-related videos reviewed in our study, we found:

- Almost all videos (97.7%) portrayed e-cigarettes positively.
- Only 2% of posts referenced vape or nicotine addiction.
- 50% of the videos referred to a vaping community, which can act to shape social norms for e-cigarette use and increase the perception that vaping is socially accepted.
- Over a quarter (26.1%) of posts violated TikTok's content policy and promoted vaping products for purchase.

You can access the publication here: <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/20/10/5761>

We have recently completed the same investigation of Instagram (yet to be published) and have found similar results to those of TikTok.

- Almost all vaping accounts portray e-cigarettes positively.
- Few referenced nicotine or addiction.
- Age restrictions or warnings were present on only a small number.
- About 20% of posts violated Instagram's content policy and promoted vaping products for purchase.

Our research shows the shortcomings in the control of vaping content, promotion and sales in the bricks and mortar retail environment, in the online retail environment and on social media platforms.

Given the high rates of youth uptake of vaping, more needs to be done to manage this product and prevent exposure and access. There needs to be strengthening of regulations, improved monitoring, and increased enforcement and penalties.

Thank you again for your action in this really concerning area. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

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On behalf of the research team: Professor Tama Leaver, A/Professor Katharina Wolf, A/Professor Becky Freeman, Dr Kahliia McCausland

## References

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