

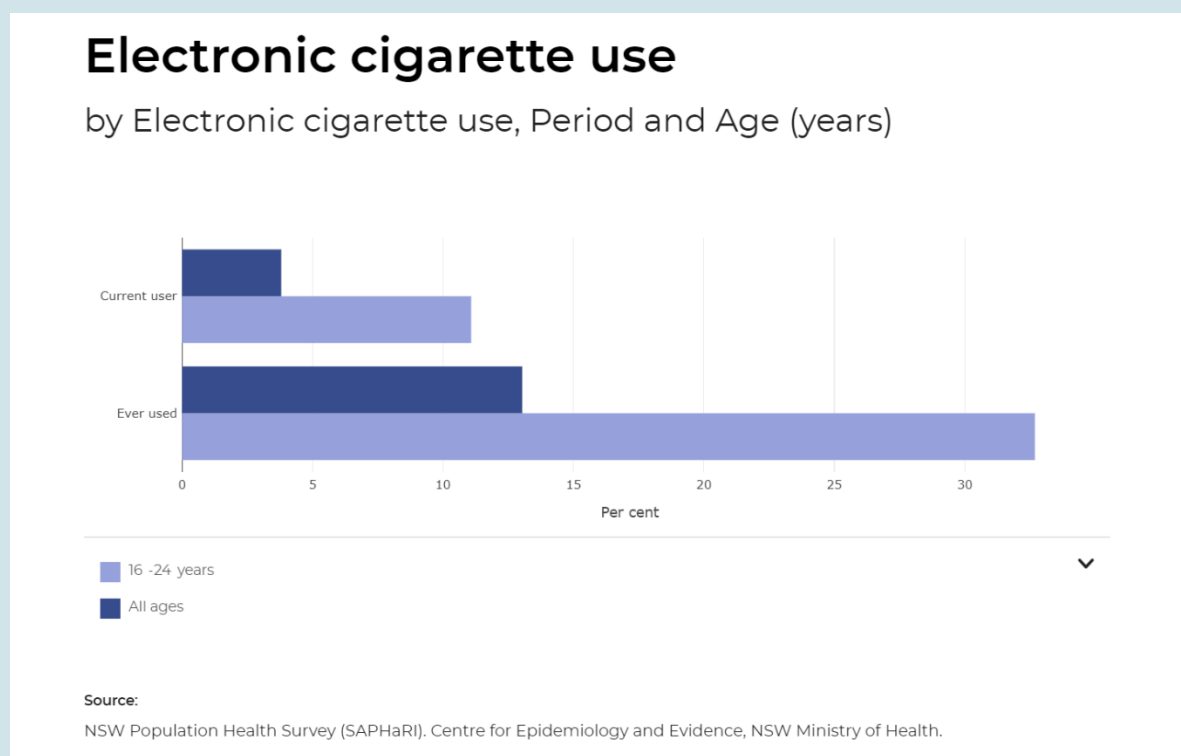
## Vaping and Young People Survey

### Background to issue

Electronic cigarettes (or e-cigarettes) are battery operated devices that heat a liquid (also known as e-liquid) to produce a vapour that users inhale. They are also known as 'e-cigs' or 'vapes'.

In 2021, the NSW Population Health Survey estimated that 16.2% of adults in NSW had used an electronic cigarette at least once and 5.5% were current (daily or occasional) users of electronic cigarettes. This was a significant increase from the 2020 estimates of 9.7% of adults in NSW having used an electronic cigarette at least once and 2.1% being current users<sup>1</sup>.

Furthermore, over the combined years of 2020 and 2021, use of electronic cigarettes in NSW was highest among persons aged 16-24 years, for both use at least once (32.7%) and current (daily or occasional) use (11.1%) (Figure 1). In this same time period, among persons aged 16-24 years, males are more likely than females to have used an electronic cigarette at least once (37.4% compared to 27.7%)<sup>2</sup>.



**Figure 1:** Electronic cigarette use by age

# NSLHD Population Health Promotion Vaping and Young People Survey Results Report

## Reason for Survey

Northern Sydney Health Promotion developed a Vaping and Young People Survey in 2022 to ascertain the prevalence of vaping among young people living in Northern Sydney Local Health District as well as attitudes towards and reasons for vaping. The survey was developed due to the lack of data at a Local Health District level on HealthStats NSW and to provide a better understanding of e-cigarette use by young people at a local level. Access to local data will assist Health Promotion to assess the need for targeted strategies and make recommendations for e-cigarette harm reduction among young people.

## Respondents

A total of 382 respondents participated in the survey with 28 respondents excluded as they were not aged between 14 and 18 years of age.

## Survey Dissemination

The survey utilised the Northern Sydney Health Promotion Youth Consultants to disseminate the survey at predominantly youth focused settings and/or events. Respondents were able to complete the survey using Health Promotion iPads and/or their own mobile phones using the survey QR code. The survey was disseminated at the following settings:

- West Ryde Community Hall – Battle of the Bands Youth Event
- Mosman Youth Centre
- Lane Cove Youth Centre
- North Sydney Youth Centre
- Manly Corso
- Chatswood Interchange
- Ravenswood School for Girls, Gordon
- Wenona School, North Sydney

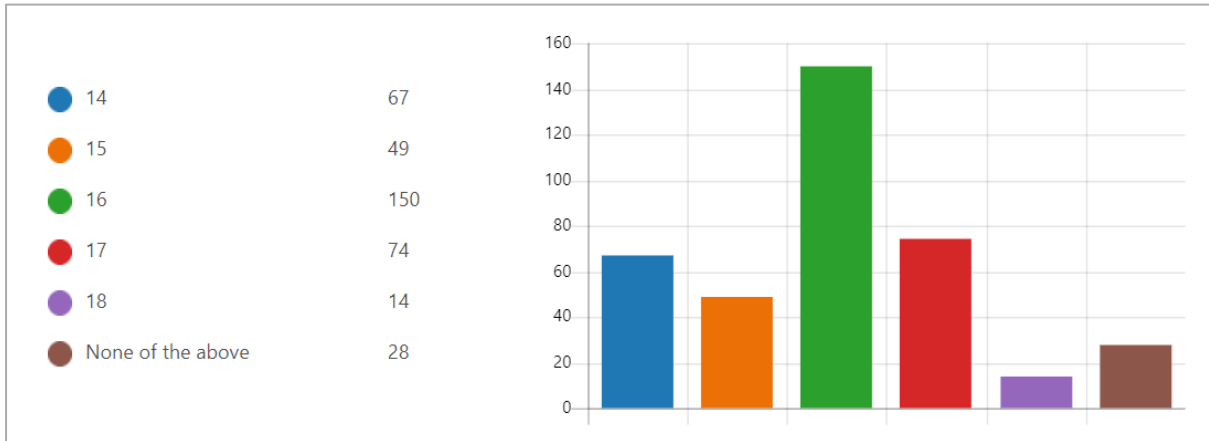
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## Results

A total of 354 young people completed the survey questions, some of which included skip logic. A summary of the responses are highlighted in the following discussion.

### Age of respondents

Respondents aged 16 years had the highest number of responses (150) followed by those aged 17 (74) and aged 14 (67).



**Graph 1:** Q1 How old are you?

### Lifetime Vape Use

In terms of lifetime use of vapes, 30% of the survey respondents aged between 14 and 18 years (106 of 354 respondents) reported that they had 'ever' used a vape.



**Graph 2:** Q2 Have you ever used a vape?

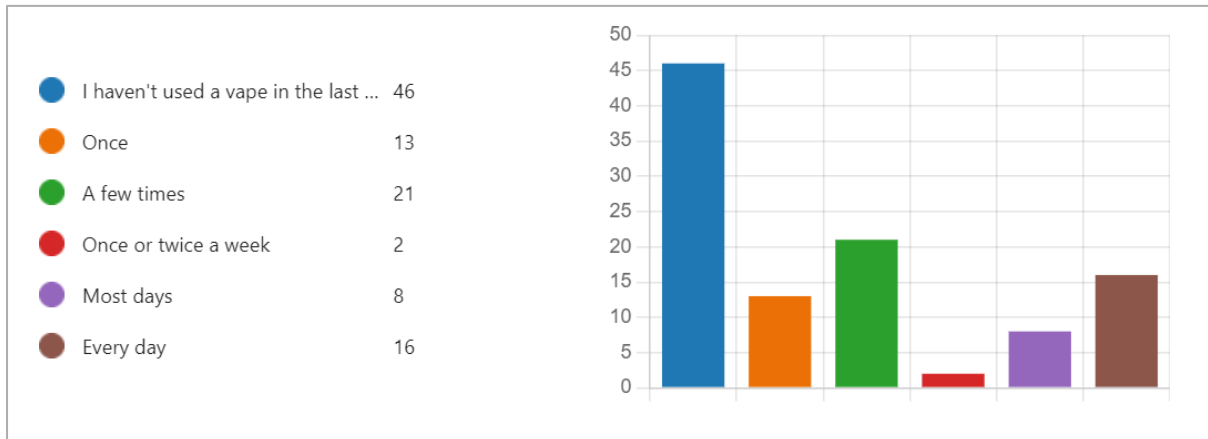
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## Vaping frequency

Of the 106 respondents who reported that they had 'ever used a vape', 60 respondents (56%) indicated that they had used a vape from 'once' to 'everyday' in the last month with the most common response being 'a few times' (n = 21) followed by 'everyday' (n=16).

The 'everyday' users made up 15% of the respondents who had used a vape in the last month.

An interesting finding was that the majority (76%) of respondents who 'ever vaped' were female (81 out of 106).



**Graph 3:** Q3 How often have you used a vape in the last month?

## Changes in vaping use

A total of 66 respondents reported that they vaped 'about the same' or 'more' during the 2021 COVID-19 lockdown comprising 62% of survey respondents. This is an interesting finding as the lockdown and survey roll out took place post the change in regulation to the Therapeutic Goods Administration decision which required that consumers need a valid prescription to import nicotine vaping products, such as nicotine e-cigarettes, nicotine pods and liquid nicotine from 1 October 2021.

It was already and remains illegal for other Australian retailers, such as tobacconists, 'vape' shops and convenience stores, to sell consumers nicotine vaping products, even if the consumer has a prescription.



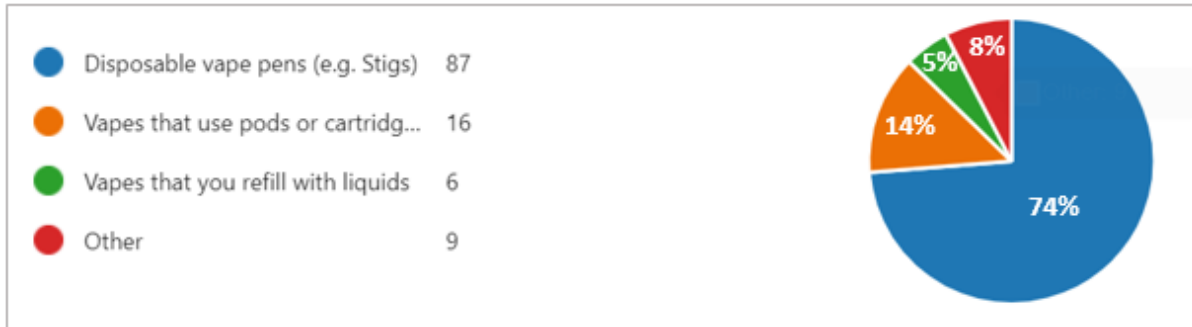
**Graph 4:** Q4 Did your vaping use change during the recent COVID-19 lockdown?

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## Types of vaping devices used

This question permitted more than one response with a total of 118 responses. The majority of respondents reported usually using 'disposable' vapes (n=87).

Disposable vapes have been identified as a rising threat to the environment causing plastic waste, electronic waste and hazardous waste<sup>3</sup>.

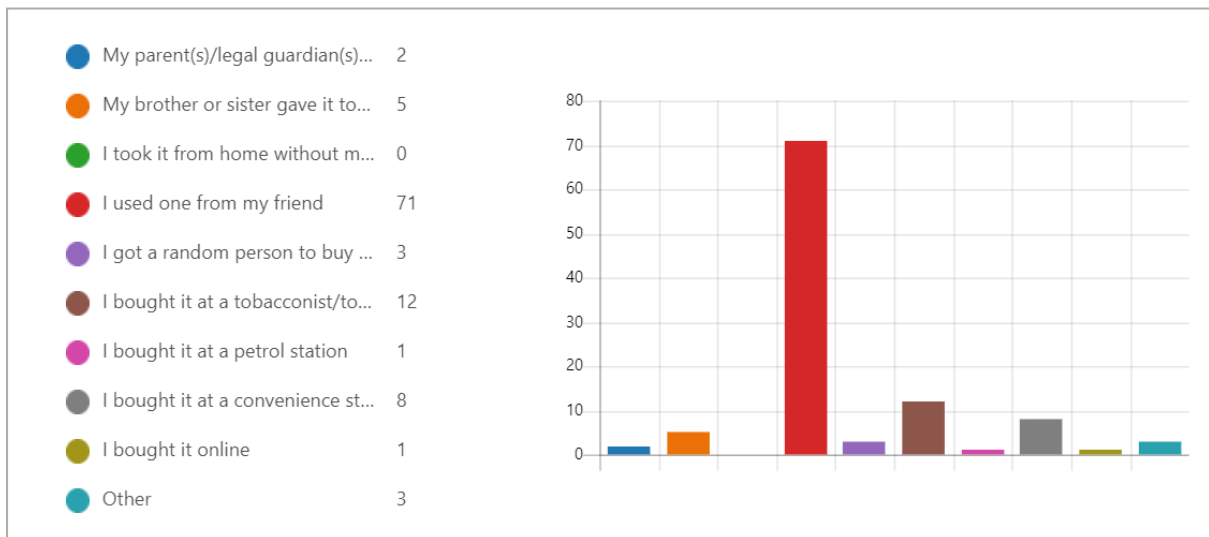


**Graph 5:** Q5 Which types of vapes do you usually use?

## Access to vaping devices

When thinking about the last time they had vaped, the majority (66%) of young people reported 'I used one from my friend'. Of respondents who had purchased vapes themselves they had purchased it at a tobacconist/tobacco shop (12) or bought it at a convenience store (8).

This finding shows that even though it is illegal for Australian retailers such as tobacconists and convenience stores to sell e-cigarette products to minors, retailers continue to break the law.

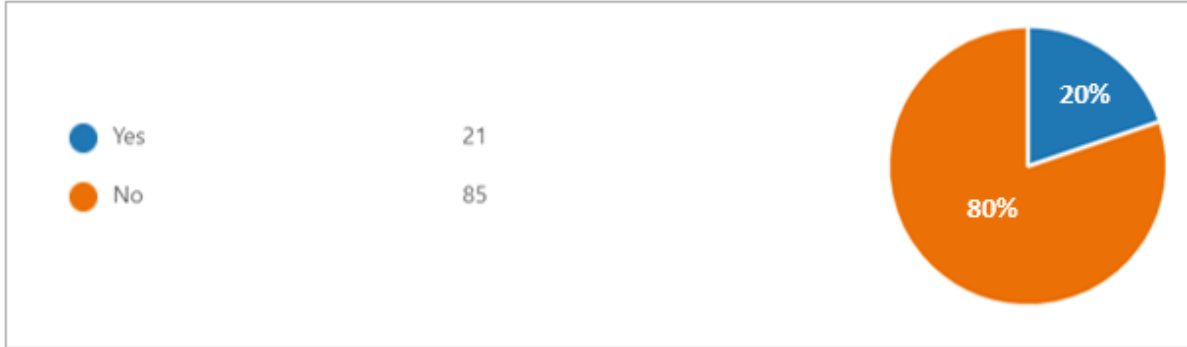


**Graph 6:** Q6 Thinking about the last time you vaped, how did you get it?

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## Ease of access to vapes

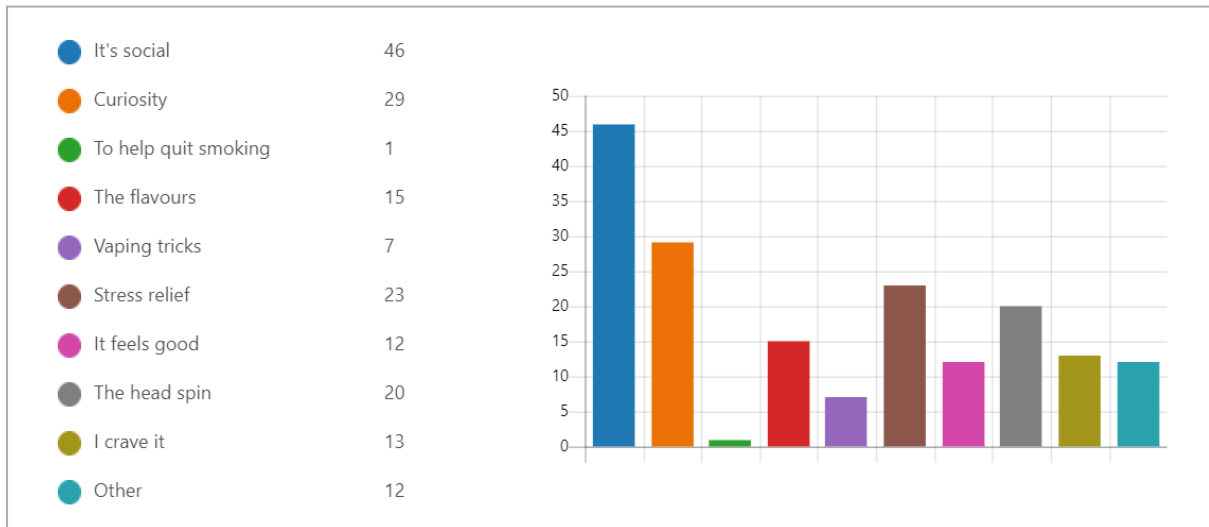
The majority (80%) of young people reported they had not found it more difficult to obtain vapes in recent months. These results suggest that the change to e-cigarette laws making e-cigarettes and e-liquids containing nicotine a prescription only medicine in October 2021 has not impacted on supply/sale of illegal e-cigarettes to minors.



**Graph 7:** Q7 In recent months, have you found it more difficult to obtain vapes?

## Reasons for vaping

When asked why young people vape the top answers were: 'It's social' 44%, 'Curiosity' 28%, 'Stress relief' 22%, 'The head spin' 19%, 'The flavours' 14%, and 'Crave it' 12%.



**Graph 8:** Q8 Can you tell us why you vape?

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## Peer vaping

Majority (64%) of the 354 young people who completed the survey reported having friends that vape.



**Graph 9:** Q9 Do you have friends that vape?

## Young people's stories and comments about vaping

There were 127 comments or stories recorded by young people about vaping. Of the 127 comments/stories, 69 of these were actual comments and not answering 'no' to the question. Of those who shared a comment or story, 16% of these were about nicotine addiction and/or dependence.

The comments/stories below capture some of our young people's experience with vapes.

*"I guess a lot of kids that continue to vape that I know don't want to stop - they think they're too cool"*

*"She has been trying to quit vaping for so long. I've been telling her and she wants to as well. She's so surrounded by it that she cannot stop."*

*"I used to vape but my asthma got worse so I stopped"*

*"I know someone that was coughing up blood due to excessive use of vapes."*

*"They tried to quit but couldn't"*

*"I have friends that struggle to exercise/run after vaping."*

*"It felt good for a while but then I started to feel very sick every time I used one. The last time I used one was for stress relief and over a month ago."*

*"It gets addictive really easily, even if you only started out of curiosity, or to do it socially. A lot of my friends are heavily addicted and find it really hard to quit."*

*"I'd say at my school at least 75% of the students have been exposed to them and at least 25% use them."*

*"I have walked into school bathrooms many times smelling and seeing people vaping."*

*"I think that if vapes hadn't been invented, our generation would not have smoked a lot or become addicted to nicotine, so it's really sad to be honest."*

*"Some of my friends are so addicted to the point they were getting cravings and withdrawals on camp."*

**Graph 10:** Q10 Do you have any comments or stories you'd like to share, based on yours or your friend's experience with vaping?

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## Smoking status

The majority (82%) of young people surveyed about vaping reported being a non-smoker. This finding indicates that young people in NSLHD are not taking up vaping as an alternative to smoking.



**Graph 11:** Do you consider yourself?

## Gender

Females made up the majority (79%) of survey respondents. This finding is not consistent with current NSW and Australian health data which shows that young males have higher prevalence rates of smoking e-cigarettes than young females<sup>4</sup>.



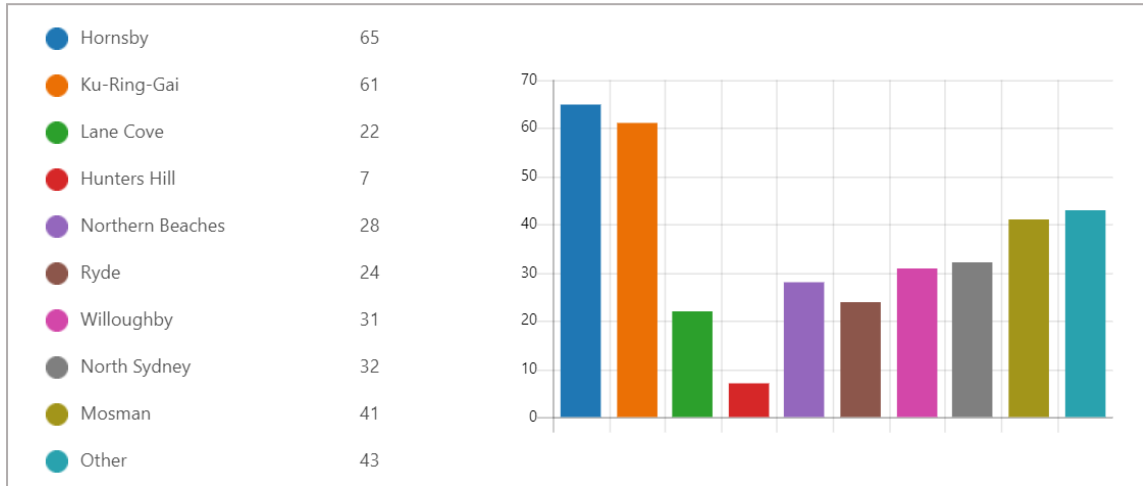
**Graph 12:** Which gender best describes you?



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## Local government area

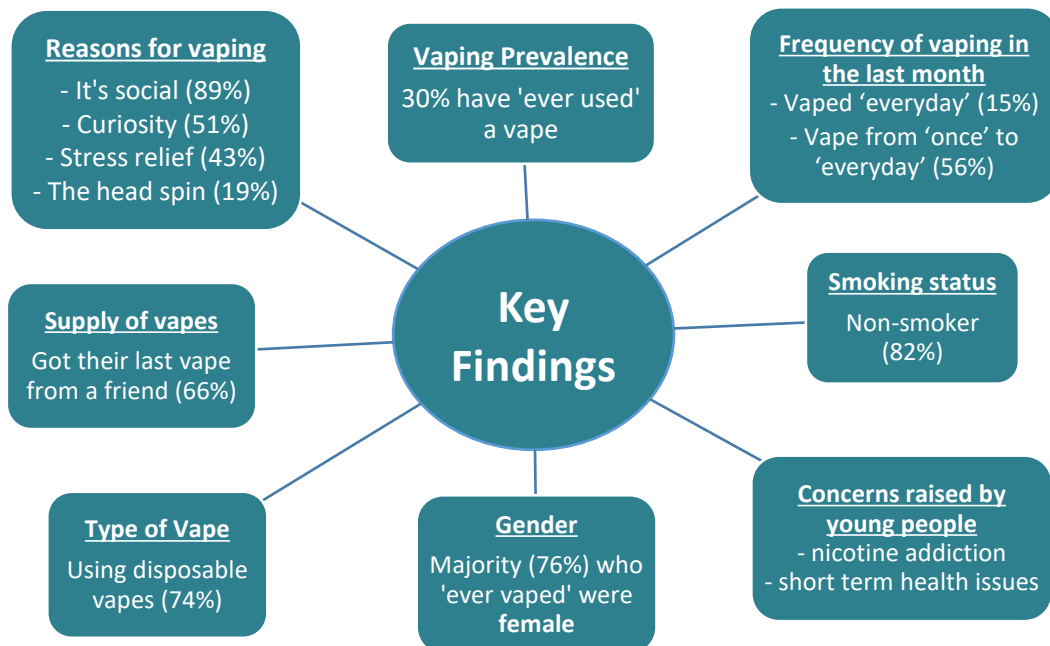
A large proportion of respondents lived in the Hornsby and Ku-Ring-Gai local government areas. Survey locations were selected based on scheduling of youth events and/or popular youth settings. This may mean that these areas are over represented in the results.



**Graph 13:** Which local government area do you live in?

## Survey Key Findings

The figure below captures the key findings of the survey and highlights potential areas for strategy development.



# NSLHD Population Health Promotion

## Vaping and Young People Survey Results Report

### Discussion

In recent years, the National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2019<sup>5</sup> reported fewer Australians are smoking tobacco, highlighting that falls are mainly driven by younger generations not taking up smoking. The rise in the use of e-cigarettes, particularly by young people, could threaten the decline of smoking rates in Australia.

In terms of overall prevalence in Northern Sydney, 15% of survey respondents who had 'ever vaped' identified as vaping 'everyday'. This rate is already higher than the NSW rate (11.1%) for current (daily or occasional) e-cigarette use for people 16-24 years, without factoring in occasional use. According to HealthStats NSW current users are classified as persons who answered as using electronic cigarettes occasionally or daily. This data suggests that Northern Sydney has a substantially higher rate of e-cigarette use than NSW.

The overall prevalence data captured in this survey may be under representative of actual prevalence due to the majority of respondents and those who had 'ever vaped' being female. Current NSW Health<sup>6</sup> and Australian health data<sup>7</sup> shows young adult males (16-24 years and 18-24 years) have higher prevalence rates of smoking e-cigarettes than young females aged 16-24 years and 18-24 years.

A recent American study found that the adolescent participants reported social outcomes as a positive reason for initiating e-cigarette use<sup>8</sup>. This finding was supported by our survey with 44% of the survey respondents who vape reporting that they do so because it is social.

Northern Sydney data indicates that many young people who use vapes are struggling with nicotine addiction. Young people are concerned about how highly addictive vapes can be, even when using them out of curiosity or socially. Nicotine addiction seems to be an issue and concern for young people, with 11% of comments/stories shared referring to 'addiction' or dependence'.

The results also indicate that the change to e-cigarette laws making e-cigarettes and e-liquids containing nicotine a prescription only medicine in October 2021 has not impacted on supply/sale of illegal e-cigarettes to minors. This highlights the need for advocacy efforts in this space.

### Recommendations

#### Advocacy

- Use the key findings to support advocacy efforts around e-cigarette legislation, illegal supply of e-cigarettes.
- Advocate for the inclusion of vaping information for parents and students in transition packs from primary to high schools.

#### Communication

- Use key findings to develop communication strategies targeting vaping among young people in Northern Sydney and link with existing resources and campaigns e.g. NSW Health 'Facts About Vaping Toolkit'

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- Share key findings with Community Drug Action Teams, schools, youth services, local government, NSLHD Public Health Unit, and the Ministry of Health Vaping and Young People Network.
- Develop social media campaign targeting young people in NSLHD using qualitative findings from the Northern Sydney Vaping and Young People Survey.
- Based on feedback from NSLHD Youth Consultants, advocate for additional information as part of the 'Facts about Vaping' resources relating to the health effects of the chemicals in vapes to make it more meaningful and relatable.

## Partnership

- Collaborate with the NSLHD Health Promotion School Years team to disseminate school based strategies.
- Collaborate with the NSLHD School Link Coordinators to develop a list of AOD support services to share with schools for referring children suspected of nicotine addiction (SDECC).

## Research

- Re-survey in 12 months' time using social media to capture a more even representation of male and female respondents across NSLHD to provide a true reflection of vaping among young people in NSLHD. Consider including additional questions:
  - 'Has anyone stopped vaping in the last 12 months? What are your reasons for stopping vaping?'
  - If answered yes to vaping – do you consider yourself a smoker, social smoker, ex-smoker, non-smoker?
- Advocate for expansion/inclusion of e-cigarette use in regular state and national run surveys.

## Contact details

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# NSLHD Population Health Promotion Vaping and Young People Survey Results Report

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<sup>1</sup> NSW Population Health Survey (SAPHaRI). Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence, NSW Ministry of Health.

<sup>2</sup> Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence. HealthStats NSW. Sydney: NSW Ministry of Health. Available at: <https://www.healthstats.nsw.gov.au/#/r/104655> Accessed: 28/09/2022

<sup>3</sup> Clean Up Australia. E-cigarettes are an environmental triple threat. Available from <https://www.cleanup.org.au/e-cigarettes>

<sup>4</sup> Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence. HealthStats NSW. Sydney: NSW Ministry of Health Available at: <https://www.healthstats.nsw.gov.au/#/r/105280> Accessed: 01/11/2022

<sup>5</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020. National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2019. Drug Statistics series no. 32. PHE 270. Canberra AIHW.

<sup>6</sup> Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence. HealthStats NSW. Sydney: NSW Ministry of Health Available at: <https://www.healthstats.nsw.gov.au/#/r/105280> Accessed: 01/11/2022

<sup>7</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. National Health Survey 2020-2021, Smoking [<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/health-conditions-and-risks/smoking/latest-release#methodology>], accessed 13 July 2022

<sup>8</sup> Fairman R, Weaver S, Akani B, Dixon K, Popova, L. "You have to vape to make it through": E-cigarette Outcome Expectancies among Youth and Parents. American Journal of Health Behavior, Volume 45, Number 5, September 2021, pp. 933-946(14). Available from: <https://doi.org/10.5993/AJHB.45.5.13>