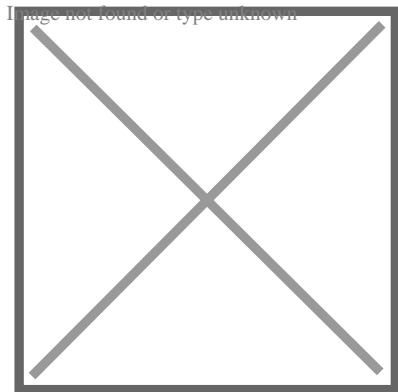
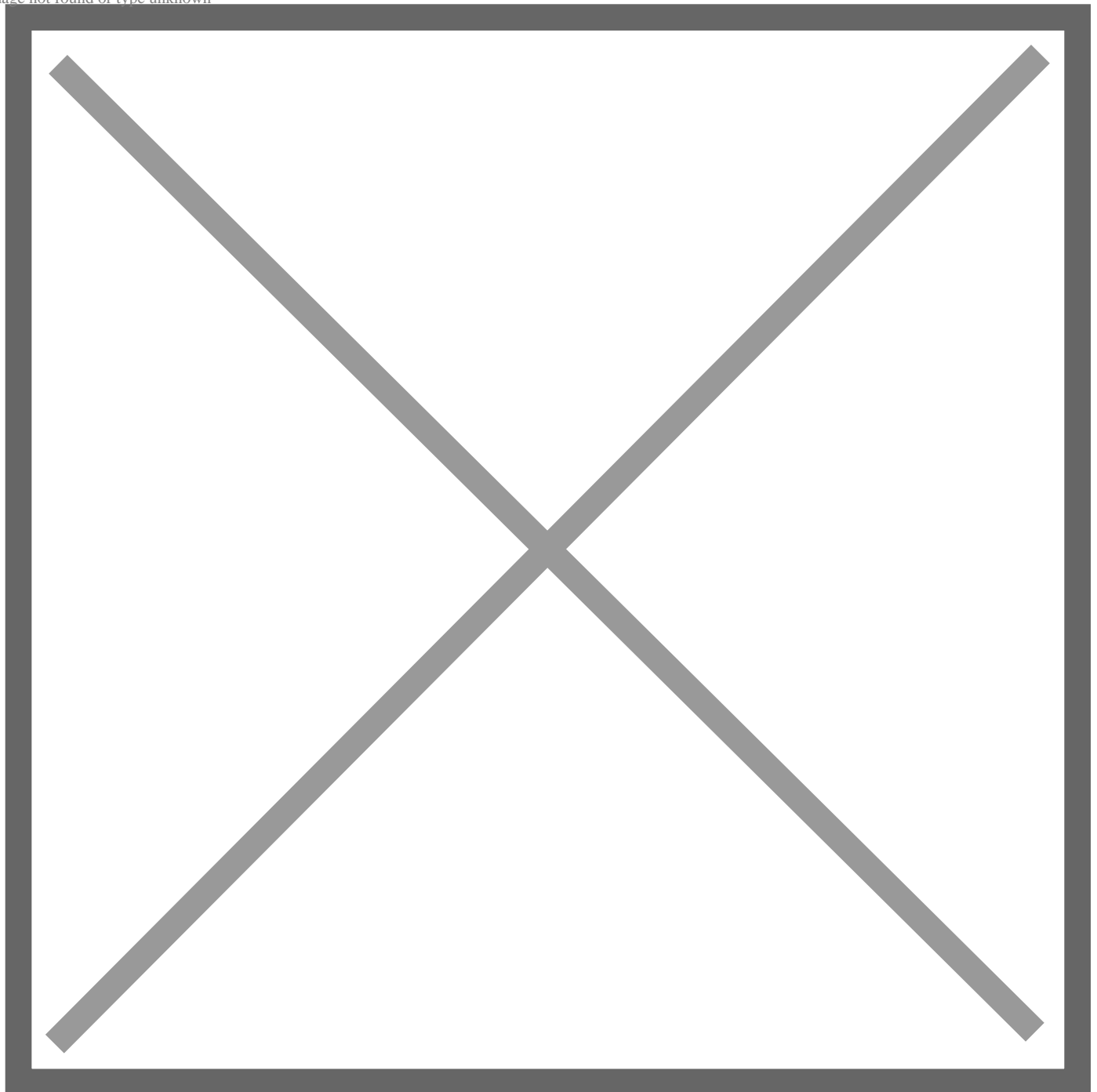


Tackling the vaping problem



By Sharmila Nagar
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The latest Department of Health and Aged Care's 2022-23 secondary school student alcohol and drug survey has revealed shocking results that reinforces the importance of recently passed laws regulating the sale of vaping products.

The 2022-23 Australian Secondary Students' Alcohol and Drug (ASSAD) survey is the largest national survey of adolescent substance use in Australia and is completed on school premises, without parental involvement, as it renders more accurate results.

The ASSAD survey had representation from all states and territories with a total of 11,145 students in Years 7-12 surveyed.

While generally there has been a decline in smoking tobacco cigarettes, unfortunately the same cannot be said for those who are more susceptible to vaping as is evident in the survey results for both younger and older students.

The increase since 2017 is from 14 per cent to 30 per cent, with students vaping in the past month from four per cent to 16 per cent.

The report stated that of the 30 per cent of Australian secondary school students who had vaped, approximately 16 per cent

of students had vaped in the past month, five per cent had vaped on 20 or more days in the past month and three per cent had vaped daily in the past month.

The majority of students surveyed who had vaped recently felt they would not find it difficult to stop or go without using e-cigarettes.

However, 21 per cent believed they would find it somewhat challenging, 11 per cent believed it would be very difficult and three per cent believed it would be impossible to stop.

Last year it was reported by UK Labor MP Ruth Jones that students were leaving exams early due to vape cravings.

When questioned, 60 per cent of students sourced their last e-cigarette from a friend. Alarming 45 per cent indicated that their friend was under 18 years of age.

Other data shows that for those who purchased their own e-cigarette device, 29 per cent purchased it at a vape shop, 20 per cent through the internet, 12 per cent at a tobacconist and 10 per cent from a dealer.

Though some of the findings of the survey would be unsurprising to educators, they are still equally concerning.

The SSTUWA has previously met with representatives from the Australian Council of Smoking and Health (ACOSH) to discuss concerns of smoking and vaping in educational settings.

Apart from the immediate health implications, we know that educators are having to deal with disruptive behaviours when addressing students who are vaping.

School administrators are trying to combat vaping by using vape detectors, amongst other behaviour management strategies.

What's even more shocking is a recent article in *The West Australian* newspaper which claimed children as young as 10 were developing signs of emphysema due to vaping.

Unfortunately, young students who vape are also three times more likely to take up tobacco smoking.

We know that in schools, there is an anti-vaping toolkit for schools to use, however we feel this is yet another policy that lands on the lap of teachers and school administrators.

While schools and TAFE colleges need to be properly resourced to deal with this, this is also importantly a community issue and not solely the responsibility of educators.

For this reason, the SSTUWA Executive endorsed a letter from ACOSH urging all MPs to support the Vaping Reforms Bill (see below).

We are happy that the Vaping Reforms Bill 2024 subsequently passed Federal Parliament in late June.

This Bill includes:

- Banning and restricting the importation, manufacturing and supply of non-therapeutic vapes to keep them out of reach of children.
- Closing the non-nicotine loophole, simplifying compliance and enforcement both at the border and within every state and territory.
- Supporting adults in quitting smoking by ensuring that vapes from pharmacies from 1 October are provided only following a consultation with a pharmacist (and only with a GP's prescription until 1 October).
- Introducing penalties for non-pharmacy retailers/sellers who possess vapes, while ensuring individuals who use vapes are not penalised.
- Establishing quality and product standards for vapes sold in pharmacies including plain packaging, maximum nicotine concentration levels, with flavours restricted to mint/menthol and tobacco.

Whilst these changes are significant, one of the changes in the Bill will see vaping products dispensed at pharmacies from 1 October 2024, without a prescription to those over 18 years – instead of the prescription model which is what was supported.

In order to pass the bill on the Senate floor, this was the negotiated outcome.

The Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) stated: “While the amendments to the legislation are not PSA’s preferred approach, we also recognise the need for strong action to address the vaping public health crisis, and this starts with ending retail supply of vapes”.

The Bill is an important step forward with significant controls as of immediate effect. The SSTUWA was one of many organisations and associations that signed the open letter and we want to thank the work of ACOSH for their advocacy.

We will continue to work with them for any further reforms regarding the reduction of smoking and vaping in our schools, TAFEs and communities.

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