

## Regulating e-cigarettes in Australia: implications for tobacco use by young people

TO THE EDITOR: I write to comment on the Perspective by Wolfenden and colleagues<sup>1</sup> on e-cigarette use by young people. In the article, the authors make regulatory recommendations for e-cigarettes based on the assertion that vaping causes young people to take up smoking — the so-called gateway theory. However, while many studies have found that adolescents who try vaping are more likely to try smoking, there is no evidence of cause and effect. The longitudinal studies described only show an association and are unable to demonstrate causality.<sup>2</sup> An alternative explanation is common liability; that is, that young people who are more attracted to experimentation are more likely to try both products.

In fact, international reviews suggest that vaping is diverting adolescents away from smoking and reducing smoking rates.<sup>3</sup> As vaping rates have been increasing in young people, smoking rates are rapidly declining — a finding inconsistent with a gateway effect.

Real world studies show that most vaping by young people is experimental and short lived and only a minority use nicotine. Regular vaping among teens is almost exclusively confined to those who already smoke. A recent analysis of five national surveys in the United Kingdom of 60 000 adolescents found that regular vaping by never-smoking 11–16-year-olds was 0.1–0.5%.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps most important of all, Wolfenden and colleagues<sup>1</sup> dismiss the substantial public health benefit that could result from vaping. Population studies have indicated that millions of smokers have quit using e-cigarettes and modelling studies have found a substantial net public health benefit, even using pessimistic scenarios.<sup>5</sup>

Banning wider access to e-cigarettes on the basis of an unproven risk to adolescents would prevent access to a life-saving quitting aid for millions of smokers. A better solution is to employ strategies to minimise youth access and make vaping available for adult smokers who are otherwise unable to quit smoking with conventional therapies.

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References are available online at [www.mja.com.au](http://www.mja.com.au).

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- 4 Bauld L, MacKintosh AM, Eastwood B, et al. Young people's use of e-cigarettes across the United Kingdom: findings from five surveys 2015–2017. *Int J Environ Res Public Health* 2017; 14: pii E973.
- 5 Levy DT, Borland R, Lindblom EN, et al. Potential deaths averted in USA by replacing cigarettes with e-cigarettes. *Tob Control* 2018; 27: 18-25. ■