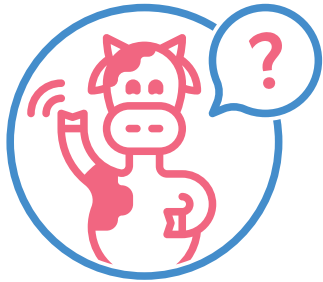


Changing our World and Children in Scotland

Vaping Evidence Paper



Changing our World (CoW) is the children and young people's advisory group for Children in Scotland. Members of the group are aged 8-25, and have different backgrounds, ideas, experiences, and views. They work with us to influence all aspects of our work to ensure it is relevant to the lives of children and young people.

Changing our World began work on the topic of vaping after a member of the group highlighted how popular it was among classmates who were in the early phases of secondary school. As a result, we have discussed the topic over the course of nine Changing our World meetings to develop understanding of the group's views on the subject and what they want to change.

Our discussions helped CoW to plan and deliver a workshop on vaping at Children in Scotland's Annual Conference in November 2022, to practitioners who work with children and young people. In September 2023, the group also met with the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health, Jenni Minto MSP, to share their views and concerns.

This paper lays out the views of Changing our World and focuses on key themes the group has identified. These themes are:

- The health impacts of vaping
- How vapes are marketed
- How vaping affects the environment
- Children and young people's experiences in school.

This paper adds to the existing evidence base around the impacts of vaping and has important implications for policymakers and those working with children and young people. CoW members have also come up with recommendations for decision-makers to address the key issues identified by the group.



► **Picture 1: CoW meeting with Jenni Minto MSP**

Health impacts of vaping

The detrimental health impacts of smoking are now common knowledge, yet there is a lack of research and data available on how vaping affects our physical health, which means there is a lack of awareness of the potential risks. This is something that Changing our World has identified in discussions. However, the group also clearly identified a range of ways in which they see vaping affecting the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

Changing our World members shared their worries about the short- and long-term effects of vaping on children and young people's health. They recognise that vaping was initially created as a mechanism to help people stop smoking, but members of the group have told us how, in their experience, many young people who have never smoked have started vaping.

"60% of people in my year vape. These are people who probably wouldn't have tried cigarettes"

Member of Changing our World

They told us that many of their peers believe that vaping is much better for you than smoking and is a healthy option. However, Changing our World members pointed out that vapes can contain sugar, caffeine and quite high levels of nicotine, and are aware that too much of these are not good for your body. They also spoke about how these substances can be addictive and cause stress to those consuming them.

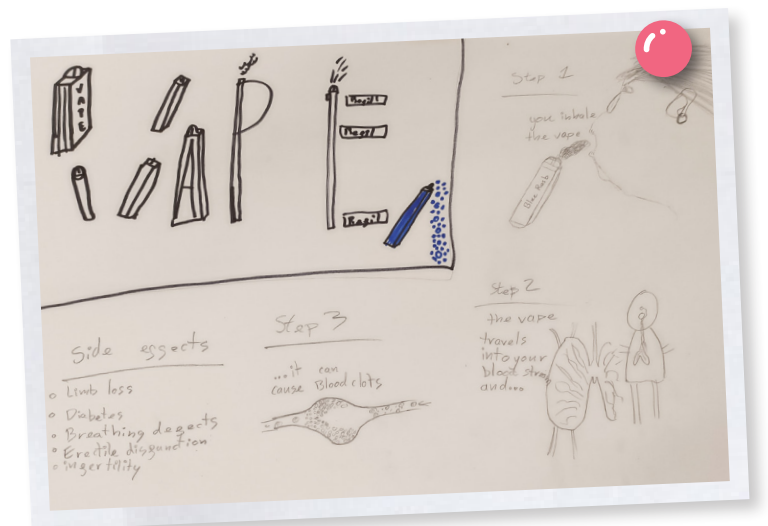
The group told us that some young people feel that vapes help to reduce stress. CoW members told us that some young people use vaping as a way of calming down and they rely upon this heavily.

We also heard from members that reusable vapes (which are more expensive) are labelled with both health and safety (flammability) warnings, whereas disposable vapes only carry safety warnings. They pointed out how this difference did not make any sense and that the health effects should be clearly stated on all types of vaping products.

Members of Changing our World also shared how some young people 'hack' the batteries of disposable vape to recharge them, and that they can accidentally ingest the liquid that leaks out, which contains harmful chemicals like copper and lithium.

The group is clear that we need to develop a better understanding of how vaping impacts our bodies, particularly for children and young people. They also feel that there needs to be far more information gathered and shared on the health and wellbeing impacts of vaping so that children and young people can understand the risks and how it might affect them.

► **Picture 2:**
poster by CoW member about the health impact of vaping



Marketing of vapes

Changing our World has consistently highlighted their concerns about the marketing of e-cigarettes and vapes to children and young people. They are concerned that despite these products being meant for people aged 18 or over, they are marketed in such a way as to appeal to children and young people.

The group has said that it feels like companies are focusing on selling to young people based on how vapes are marketed. They have spoken about how the names and flavours such as "Fizz Wizz", "Bluey's Chews" and "Just Juice" sound like sweets. They have also spoken about they come in different shapes and are made in a variety of bright colours, which appeal to children and young people.

"They have childish flavours and are always adding new ones which means young people try them and spend more money on them"

Member of Changing our World

We have also heard how these products are often advertised on various social media applications, where children and young people view them regularly.

The impact of this can be seen in their day-to-day experiences, with CoW members sharing how vapes can be treated like collectable items by some young people and that they are encouraged to get the newest flavour or colour. We also heard how some young people wear vapes around their neck like an accessory.

Changing our World members told us how this can result in peer pressure for children and young people, which can lead to people smoking vapes and buying vapes to go along with their friends.

"Vaping is the popular thing to do – you feel pressure to have a puff"

Member of Changing our World

Changing our World also discussed how easily young people can buy vapes, highlighting that this is too easy and that it should not be so accessible. Members were aware of which shops in their local communities are selling vapes to children and young people. They also told us it is easy to buy vapes online and get them delivered, as anyone with a debit card can buy vaping products without requiring ID. Changing our World members feel that shops need to be accountable for this and make sure they are not selling vaping products to people under 18. They also wanted better enforcement of the law about not selling vaping products to under 18s, and training for shop owners and workers to raise their awareness of the issues.



▲ Picture 3:
CoW poster about how vapes are marketed

The group also spoke about the visibility of vaping products in shops and the contrast between this and how cigarettes and tobacco products are covered and locked away. Members highlighted that sometimes vapes are even in sweet aisles and are very accessible to children and young people.

“It is at your fingertips”

Member of Changing our World

The group was clear that they want the laws around the display and marketing of vaping products to match those for cigarettes, so they are hidden from view. They also want the advertising of vapes on social media to be more restricted.

Environmental impacts

Changing our World is concerned about the potential impact of vaping on the environment. Group members told us they are worried about the impact on local environments, but also the effects on a global scale because vapes and e-cigarettes are made of plastic and have batteries in them.

All members of Changing Our World have seen vapes and e-cigarettes discarded in their local communities and are also used to seeing them discarded in school playgrounds and parks. One member told us they found 25 vapes that had been dumped on a single street. Not only does this negatively affect the appearance of communities, but the products will not biodegrade, thereby polluting these areas. The group also felt that discarded vapes could be a danger to younger children and pets. Moreover, disposable vapes are flammable and have caused fires when disposed of incorrectly.



The group feels that there needs to be an awareness-raising campaign for everyone about the environmental impact of throwing vapes away. This could be on TV, posters, social media and in schools.

“The world does not need any more single use plastic. We know what a waste of resources this is and the potential to pollute the environment and harm wildlife”

Member of Changing our World

Experiences in school

There are two areas where vaping interacts with education that Changing our World is concerned about. One is how schools teach children and young about vaping (and the associated risks) and the second is how schools respond to the issue of vaping among pupils.

Members of the group said that schools talk about the risks of smoking cigarettes as part of Personal and Social Education (PSE) and they feel that this is a successful approach to awareness raising as the number of young people who smoke is reducing. However, members shared that many schools are not discussing vaping with pupils, with a significant number of the group saying their school has never spoken about this topic.

All members of the group believe that schools need to get better at talking about vaping and the potential risks with children and young people. Changing our World members said schools should work with organisations like Fast Forward that already focus on this area, and rely on existing resources such as [the toolkits from ASH Scotland for teachers, youth workers and parents](#). They feel that PSE is a good place for young people to learn about vaping and that this should be covered in both primary and secondary schools.



▲ *Picture 4:*
CoW members after delivering their workshop at the 2022 Children in Scotland Annual Conference

Changing our World also discussed how schools address the issue of pupils vaping. They told us that sometimes schools take approaches that are not fair and are not rights-based. For example, members report schools banning or limiting toilet access for all pupils when young people had been caught vaping in toilet cubicles. The group shared various failed attempts to stop vaping occurring in school toilets such as all pupils having to use a QR code system to sign in and out of the toilets providing their name, class and the period they went during. They told us how even some teachers viewed this as a "waste of time" and apologised to students for the policy. Members told us that they thought these measures felt controlling and sometimes resulted in them having to talk about and justify their need to go to the toilet in front of the class, which is embarrassing for young people.

The group feels that children and young people (as well as parents and carers) need to be involved in co-creating solutions for tackling vaping within school. They also want more opportunities to discuss the risks and reflect on experiences rather than punishment-based approaches.

Summary

Changing our World feels that vaping is a big issue for children and young people and one that needs to be addressed. They have identified concerns relating to health impacts and it is clear that a deeper understanding of the short- and long-term effects of vaping on health and wellbeing is required.

Changing our World has evidenced how vaping impacts children and young people's health and wellbeing, their local communities and the environment, and their experiences in school. They have also discussed the impact of vaping marketing and promotion on children and young people.

While the group has not explicitly focused on the issue from a rights perspective, it is also clear that vaping interacts with a range of their rights including their right to health (Article 24), right to education (Article 28), right to privacy (Article 16), and their right to be protected from harmful information (Article 17).

The group has told us that they feel vaping products are marketed in ways that make them appealing to children and young people. As an organisation working with them,

we are clear that this breaches young people's right to a healthy environment and there must be changes to how the marketing and promotion of vaping products operates.

Members of the group have a range of ideas about what needs to change to ensure they are not overly exposed to vaping products and that their rights are respected. They feel that a total ban on vapes would be the most effective measure, but understand the challenges in achieving this. They are keen to continue to be involved in creating and delivering solutions to the challenges posed by vapes.



Changing our World's Recommendations

- We need to improve understanding of health and wellbeing impacts of vaping, especially for children and young people. As evidence emerges this needs to be communicated in a rights respecting way.
- Legislation in Scotland related to vaping needs to change and be aligned with laws on tobacco and cigarettes. This will help protect everyone's health, including that of children and young people.
- Vaping products need to be less visible in shops, in a similar way to cigarettes.
- Advertising of vaping products on social media needs to be restricted.
- Vapes should no longer be allowed to have bright and colourful branding. The packing of vaping products should be regulated and only be permitted to be plain, so it is less eye-catching or appealing to children and young people.
- There must be better enforcement of the law that prohibits the sale of vaping products to people under the age of 18.
- There should be an awareness raising campaign for everyone about the impact of disposable vaping products on the environment.
- There should be more coverage of vaping in delivery of PSE in primary and secondary schools. This should rely on existing resources but also be adapted to different contexts so it is relevant.
- Children and young people should be involved in developing solutions to vaping in school, in communities and at national level.

Getting in touch



If you would like to find out more about Changing our World and their work on vaping please contact Parisa Shirazi, Senior Policy, Projects and Participation Officer on ps Shirazi@childreninscotland.org.uk