

# Exploring Youth and Young Adults' Use of Vaping Products – Qualitative Study

## Health Canada

Final Report

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*Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.*

## **Exploring Youth and Young Adults' Use of Vaping Products Final Report**

Prepared for Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada  
Supplier name: Quorus Consulting Group Inc.  
June 2022

This report summarizes the findings from 16 online focus groups with youth and young adult vapers. The focus groups were held between May 16<sup>th</sup> and June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022 and included individuals from across the country. Sessions were segmented by age group as well as by vaping frequency. Each focus group session lasted approximately 90 minutes.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : L'exploration de l'utilisation des produits de vapotage chez les jeunes et les jeunes adultes – Étude qualitative

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Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rick Nadeau", is written over a light gray, textured rectangular background.

June 30, 2022  
Rick Nadeau, President  
Quorus Consulting Group Inc.

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# Executive summary

## Background and research objectives

The *Tobacco and Vaping Products Act* (TVPA) came into force on May 23, 2018, to regulate the manufacture, sale, labelling and promotion of tobacco products and vaping products sold in Canada. The TVPA created a new legal framework for regulating vaping products to protect young persons from nicotine addiction and tobacco use, while allowing adults to legally access vaping products as a less harmful alternative to tobacco. The Act includes regulatory authorities to respond to emerging issues, as required. Recently, in July 2021, the Government of Canada has used these authorities to implement further restrictions on vaping products, including establishing a maximum nicotine concentration of 20 mg/mL for vaping products manufactured or imported for sale in Canada. In June 2021, further restrictions on vaping product flavours were proposed as well.

A key policy objective of allowing vaping products on the market is to provide people who smoke with an alternative path enabling them to use a less harmful form of nicotine, while preventing uptake among non-smokers particularly youth. However, vaping products remain popular among youth and young adults. Therefore, reducing youth vaping prevalence is a priority for Health Canada.

Ongoing research indicates that vaping behaviours are highly variable and have changed over the course of the past couple years for a range of reasons (for example, access and COVID restrictions, product evolution).

## Research objectives

The main objective of the research was to explore Canadian youth and young adult behaviours and perceptions around vaping, and especially how they differ between those who vape infrequently (defined as fewer than 20 days out of the past 30 days) and frequently (defined as vaped at least 20 days out of the past 30 days).

Specifically, the goal was to gain a better understanding of:

- How youth access vaping products;
- How youth and young adults use vaping products;
- What devices and liquids they use and do they change;
- Who youth and young adults use vaping products with;
- Where they use them;
- When they vape;

- What they do while vaping;
- Connections with smoking cigarettes, if applicable;
- Their perceptions around the health impacts, including what they may have experienced personally, what they have heard, and where they heard it.

Data from this study will help Health Canada to better understand the fluidity of vaping behaviours among youth and young adults (for example, how they vape in social settings vs. on their own, transitions to/from smoking cigarettes), respond to the evolving needs of youth and young adults, and inform the development of future regulatory plans.

## Methodology

The research methodology consisted of 16 online focus groups with youth and young adult who vape in Canada. The focus groups were held between May 16<sup>th</sup> and June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022 and included individuals from across the country. Focus groups were segmented by age group, regions with or without flavour restrictions, and vaping frequency. Each focus group session lasted approximately 90 minutes. Participants were informed upfront that the research was being conducted on behalf of Health Canada and they each received an honorarium of \$100 for their participation. In total, 124 youth and young adults participated in the research.

Note: Those who vape, use substances, smoke, etc., are referred to as vapers, users, smokers, respectively, in the interest of brevity.

## Research findings

### Vaping products – devices

Ownership of a vaping device was quite common among frequent users, who were also generally more likely to own pod system devices. Pod devices were typically liked for their affordability, ease of switching out or replacing pods, and sleek design. Specific preference of one brand over another was most often determined based on what the user has known since they started vaping, what peers were using, available flavours, general availability, and how the device looks.

Disposable vaping products seemed popular among both frequent and infrequent users. Those who chose this format felt they were affordable and practical since they could be found in most vape shops and corner stores and purchased on a whim. Many<sup>1</sup>, especially infrequent users,

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<sup>1</sup> Terms such as “most”, “many”, “some” and “a few” are commonly used in qualitative research to distinguish between responses that were heard more frequently by a greater number of participants and responses that were heard less frequently or by a fewer number of participants. Due to the nature of qualitative research, responses are not calculated by frequency but are instead summarized to reflect trends observed in and across groups. The use of such quasi-statistical terms should not infer any particular proportion of focus group participants would say or behave in the same manner.

seemed to view disposable devices as “low commitment” – in other words, they feel that if they owned a pod system device, they would probably vape more often.

Many infrequent vapers have never owned their own device and instead will use a friend’s device. These participants had limited feedback on devices, or any particular preferences.

Vapers who own their devices typically purchased from vape shops which were generally seen as common in their area. Many also purchased their vaping products from peers at school, or from friends or family members. Those who were not of legal age tended to visit a specific store they know that does not ask for proof of age or purchased their device from a peer.

### Vaping products - liquids and nicotine levels

When it comes to refilling or replacing their vaping device, frequent users would typically replace their pod or disposable device every few days, with only a few indicating that a pod or a disposable device would last them a week or longer. Conversely, infrequent users suggested that a disposable device or a single pod would last anywhere from a week to a month. Pods or disposables were said to run out faster (sometimes only lasting a day or two) when getting together with friends, since a get-together typically meant greater use and/or sharing with others.

There was a high level of awareness of nicotine content among frequent users, many of whom specifying they consume vaping products with 2% or 2.5% nicotine content (or 20 MG). Frequent users were also acutely aware of the restrictions that were introduced that eliminated availability of products with 5% content. Other than knowing that there is nicotine in what they vape, infrequent vapers were much less aware of the specific nicotine level in the products they vape.

There was some interest, especially among frequent users, in reducing either the nicotine level of the products they vape or in reducing how much they vape overall, primarily for health reasons. That being said, nicotine remains a key part of the vaping experience, as many expressed that they would not vape without nicotine.

### Product discovery and availability

The most common way that participants discover and try new products is through their friends and social networks. Less commonly, new products are discovered when visiting vape shops through staff recommendations, promotional items, or from browsing the products in store. Very few recall seeing any sort of advertising for new vaping products.

In terms of overall availability of vaping products, many participants have been noticing that vape shops are becoming increasingly common in their area, and many explained that vaping products are typically sold at most convenience stores in their area. Overall, nearly all participants believed

that finding and purchasing their preferred vaping products has become easier since they initially started vaping, and very few feel they face any particular challenge in buying what they want.

### Current vaping patterns

Vaping patterns varied a great deal and were distinctly different between frequent and infrequent vapers.

- Typically, frequent vapers will vape often and at various points throughout each day. These individuals will vape early in the morning and throughout the day, each session involving two to three puffs and lasting a few minutes. While many started only in social situations, they no longer seek specific circumstances to vape and are just as likely to vape when they are by themselves. Some felt they are especially likely to vape if they are bored or conversely, when they are drinking with friends. It is also commonly used as stress relief, with a number of students noting that they vape more often during exam time.
- Typically, infrequent vapers are social vapers, only vaping when they are with their friends, particularly at social gatherings. These individuals might only vape on weekends or, for students, a few times during the week. When they vape, it is either short sessions involving two or three puffs (such as during a bathroom break at school or during recess), or it involves an entire evening with one or two puffs taken repeatedly throughout the evening (such as when hanging out with friends or drinking at a party). This pattern is in part largely driven by the fact that they do not own their own vaping products and will only vape what their friends have. Vaping tends to be something that “just happens” rather than being an activity that is craved or sought out with any great degree of effort.

### Reasons for vaping

Similar to many research findings in this study, results pertaining to the reasons for vaping were fairly different between frequent and infrequent vapers.

- Frequent vapers were much more inclined to explain that they vape because it’s a habit, or because they feel they are addicted. For many, this has shifted from their initial reasons to try vaping for social reasons or just “for fun” (although they do continue to vape socially).
- Some frequent vapers also explained that vaping provides some sort of stress relief or helps them disconnect.
- Infrequent users were more inclined to explain that they vape because their friends vape and that it is an activity that they do when they get together. Many will vape to either “fit in” or to share in a fun collective experience.



- Among both segments, there were those who said they aren't sure why they vape, or, upon reflection, said that their reasons for vaping are not really "good" reasons at all.
- Participants in both segments liked that vaping gives them a head rush ("headie") or makes them feel good.

### Impact of restrictions on flavours

Among both frequent and infrequent vapers, flavours play an important element in the overall vaping experience, with some saying they would not see the point in vaping if the liquid was flavourless. Availability of flavours was often listed as one of the main reasons that some participants choose a certain type of device over another. Some vapers have very specific preferences regarding which flavours they will vape.

- Those with firm flavour preferences tended to opt for fruity or sweet flavours. "Ice" or flavours that combined fruit with menthol were also popular and was sometimes said to enhance the potency or head rush, giving it the feel of a higher nicotine level.

When faced with a fictitious scenario involving a complete ban on flavours over the coming months, participants reacted in a variety of different ways:

- Many felt that this would discourage them from vaping as much if not entirely, and they believe this would also be the case for their peers who vape. This was especially true for infrequent vapers who felt refraining from vaping would be easy. For frequent vapers, many also felt they would curtail their vaping although they believed this would be difficult. Some frequent vapers, especially those who had tried to quit or who had considered quitting said that this would likely be the push they needed to actually quit.
- Others would be okay with the elimination of flavours and would continue to vape since the feeling and/or nicotine they get when they vape is more important than the flavour.
- Some believed they would still be able to find their favourite flavours through "connections" they have, through some of the retailers they have already been using, online, or through people they know in other jurisdictions.
- Very few of the participants would resort to producing their own liquids. A few who started vaping to quit cigarettes said they would return to smoking cigarettes.

For participants in jurisdictions with restrictions on the sale of flavours, very few seemed to remember those restrictions being introduced do not feel that those restrictions have had any impact on their vaping behaviours. In jurisdictions where the restrictions limited the sale of flavoured products to vape shops, participants tended to purchase their products from these

shops anyways. In jurisdictions where flavoured products are not available at all, participants explained that they knew retailers who would sell flavoured products, they ordered their products online, or they “stocked up” when they traveled to a province with no such restrictions.

### Multiuse

Co-use was fairly common among both frequent and infrequent vapers, with alcohol and vaping being the most popular combination. Quite a few vapers also mentioned consuming cannabis, although this was mostly as a separate activity and usually involved smoking or edibles rather than vaping (from a separate device). Very few participants also smoked cigarettes, while shisha or hookah use was mentioned in a number of groups by one or two participants.

Participants were asked to provide a chronology of their substance use with a focus on tobacco, nicotine (vaping), alcohol, cannabis and other recreational drugs. While this was very individual, some of the trends noticed through this exercise included the following:

- Alcohol was often one of the first substances consumed, which would often happen at ages of 13 to 17 years. For a few, cigarette smoking also tended to start with the use of alcohol.
- Either vaping or cannabis tended to be the next substance started, often seen in the 16 to 18 years-old range. These substances were usually added to the use of alcohol rather than replacing anything although for a few, vaping replaced or reduced the use of cigarettes. A few explained that they did replace some of their alcohol use with cannabis. Those who started consuming cannabis after they had started vaping did not believe that one activity led to the other. They feel they would have started consuming cannabis anyways.
- There has been some stability in the frequency of use of these substances since late teens other than perhaps vaping, which, especially for frequent vapers, has increased over time. Some decreased their use of alcohol and vaping as they got older and their circle of friends changed while some have also made a conscious decision to reduce their use of these substances recognizing that they are having a detrimental effect on their health.
- Cigarettes were rarely used, and there was low interest. Vaping was preferred as many felt cigarettes have an unpleasant smell that is also harder to hide. There was very little mention of other recreational drugs.

### Changing Substance Use Patterns

Over the coming years, very few participants expect their use of any of the given substances to increase. Some of the younger participants suspect their use of alcohol might increase when they attend post-secondary and a few infrequent vapers suspect their vaping might increase since they feel they are slowly becoming addicted to it.

The most common shift in substance use over the coming years is likely going to be a reduction or cessation in vaping among frequent vapers. A few have already made efforts to reduce their vaping and plan to eventually stop vaping altogether. There was a sense that “older people just don’t vape” and that they will eventually age out of it, too. Participants were more likely to expect they would stop vaping at some point in the near future than that they would stop their cannabis use.

### Perceptions regarding the health impacts of vaping

Many feel that society has become increasingly receptive to vaping, especially as an alternative to smoking cigarettes. Most participants would not consider themselves well informed about the health impacts of vaping and very few had sought out information. There was awareness of some health concerns, especially in light of media coverage of serious illnesses and deaths associated with vaping which they believe has added to the negative perceptions that some have on vaping. That said, participants tend to agree that there is a lack of scientific evidence suggesting that vaping is detrimental to their health and, until such evidence appears, many are not overly concerned. Lack of concern is particularly noticeable among infrequent vapers who feel that they do not vape nearly enough to be concerned. Those most likely to have concerns or to have taken some form of action to curb or end their vaping are those who had experienced ill effects such as shortness of breath during physical activity, or those who believe that inhaling a foreign substance is not good for your lungs.

### Qualitative research disclaimer

Qualitative research seeks to develop insight and direction rather than quantitatively projectable measures. The purpose is not to generate “statistics” but to hear the full range of opinions on a topic, understand the language participants use, gauge degrees of passion and engagement and to leverage the power of the group to inspire ideas. Participants are encouraged to voice their opinions, irrespective of whether or not that view is shared by others.

Due to the sample size, the special recruitment methods used, and the study objectives themselves, it is clearly understood that the work under discussion is exploratory in nature. The findings are not, nor were they intended to be, projectable to a larger population.

Specifically, it is inappropriate to suggest or to infer that few (or many) real world users would behave in one way simply because few (or many) participants behaved in this way during the sessions. This kind of projection is strictly the prerogative of quantitative research.

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## Research purpose and objectives

The *Tobacco and Vaping Products Act* (TVPA) came into force on May 23, 2018, to regulate the manufacture, sale, labelling and promotion of tobacco products and vaping products sold in Canada. The TVPA creates a new legal framework for regulating vaping products to protect young persons from nicotine addiction and tobacco use, while allowing adults to legally access vaping products as a less harmful alternative to tobacco. This Act applies to a range of devices and substances, such as e-liquids, and covers vaping products with and without nicotine. The Act bans the sale and promotion of all vaping products to persons under 18, prohibits the promotion of flavours that appeal to youth, and creates regulatory authority to mandate the display of health-related labels on vaping devices and refill packages. The Act also includes regulatory authorities to respond to emerging issues, as required. Recently, in July 2021, the Government of Canada has used these authorities to implement further restrictions on vaping products, including establishing a maximum nicotine concentration of 20 mg/mL for vaping products manufactured or imported for sale in Canada. In June 2021, further restrictions on vaping product flavours were proposed as well.

A key policy objective of allowing vaping products on the market is to provide people who smoke with an alternative path enabling them to use a less harmful form of nicotine, while preventing uptake among non-smokers particularly youth. However, vaping products remain popular among youth and young adults. According to the 2021 Canadian Tobacco and Nicotine Survey (CTNS), 13% of youth (ages 15 to 19 years old) and 17% of young adults (ages 20 to 24 years old) have vaped in the past 30 days compared to 4% of adults (ages 25 years and older). Therefore, reducing youth and young adult vaping prevalence is a priority for Health Canada.

Ongoing research indicates that vaping behaviours are highly variable and have changed over the course of the past couple years for a range of reasons (such as access and COVID restrictions and evolving needs). This research will do a deep dive into the vaping behaviours and perceptions of youth and young adults (such as exploring access, details on vaping sessions, devices used, perceptions of harm, smoking cigarettes, etc.).

Data from this study will help Health Canada to better understand the fluidity of vaping behaviours among youth and young adults (including how they vape in social settings vs. on their own, transitions to/from smoking cigarettes), respond to the evolving needs of youth and young adults, and inform the development of future regulatory plans.

### Research objectives

The main objective of the research was to undertake an in-depth look into Canadian youth and young adult behaviours and perceptions around vaping, and especially how they differ between

those who vape infrequently (defined as fewer than 20 days out of the past 30 days) and frequently (defined as vaped at least 20 days out of the past 30 days).

Specifically, the goal was to gain a better understanding of:

- How youth access vaping products (for example, through social connections like friends, family, others; through retail, be it online or in-person);
- How youth and young adults use vaping products (for example, detailed patterns of use, such as how many puffs per session, how many sessions per day);
- What devices and liquids they use (for example, pods, refillable, flavours, nicotine level) and do they change;
- Who youth and young adults use vaping products with (for example, with friends, alone, etc.);
- Where they use them (for example, at home, at school, out socially);
- When they vape;
- What they do while vaping;
- Connections with smoking cigarettes, if applicable (for example, did their vaping lead to them trying smoking or would they have tried smoking regardless);
- Their perceptions around the health impacts, including what they may have experienced personally, what they have heard, and where they heard it (for example, media, social media, friends, family).

Details on the methodology, recruitment screener and moderation guide follow the research findings section.

Those who vape, use substances, smoke, etc., are referred to as vapers, users, smokers, respectively, in the interest of brevity.

## Research findings

### Vaping products - devices

The first part of the discussion was spent exploring the vaping devices used, and the reasons for this choice. These conversations were typically different among frequent and infrequent vapers.

Ownership of a vaping device was quite common among frequent users, while infrequent vapers were less likely to own their own device.

Vaping devices can include pod system devices (a rechargeable battery paired with disposable nicotine pods), refillable devices (a device containing a tank that the user refills from another bottle), or disposable (the entire device is disposed of once it runs out).

Among frequent vapers, pod system devices were the most commonly owned, while some preferred disposables. These participants were most likely to own pod systems which were typically liked for their affordability over the longer term (compared to disposables), ease of replacing pods or switching between flavours, and design or size which allows for conspicuous use but also comfort in the hand. Users who had switched from disposables to a pod system mentioned they did so because of the cost, the availability of flavours, or out of environmental concerns, particularly as they started to vape more and dispose of more devices.

The device most often mentioned was the Stlth, with other mentions including Veev, Relx, Caliburn, Allo and Juul (although less and less), among others.

Specific preference of one pod mod brand over another was most often determined based on what the user has known since they started vaping. As well, participants considered what the latest “in” device was (based on what peers were using or what they saw more of around them in general, including in stores), the flavours available, general availability of the pods they need, recommendations from a salesperson at a vape shop, and how the device looks (size, colour, etc.). Their devices were often seen as an accessory that fit with their style or personality, and the choice of colour or design (“skinny,” “sleek,” “not too bulky”) were also important contributing factors.

Some participants mentioned other features of their particular device that they liked, including that they could switch the skin and they would exchange colours with their peers, that it was easy and fast to charge, that it had an app, or that they could control the flow with a button.

Pod devices were most often purchased at vape shops, but a few also mentioned purchasing these devices from corner stores or gas stations. A number of participants got them as gifts from friends or family, or they were handed down from older siblings. A few mentioned that they received them for free at a shop or somewhere else such as at a bar or party, where they were being given

away as promotional items. Others purchased them at a considerable discount when a new or redesigned product came on the market. Buying vape devices online was less popular.

Ownership of multiple devices was relatively rare and again, most likely to happen among frequent users. If multiple devices were owned, it was typically to have a device in different locations (such as one in the car and one at home or at work), or it was an old device that was only used occasionally, if ever. Some also mentioned owning more than one device since they will simply go and buy a new one if they misplace their device, when a device becomes obsolete or discontinued, or when they felt a better or more popular one was on the market.

Disposable vaping products are popular among both frequent and infrequent users. Many, especially among infrequent users, seemed to like the fact that this was the “low commitment” option – in other words, there was a sense that if they owned a pod system or refillable device, they would probably use it more often and feel more “committed” to vaping, whereas a disposable device allowed them to connect and disconnect with vaping more easily. They said they could – and would – take breaks when they did not have one on hand, or only buy them when there was a special occasion when they knew they would want to vape.

*“Whenever I've been using my friend's vape too much, I feel bad so I go and I buy a disposable because I know that when it's done, I won't buy another one but then that cycle keeps repeating.”* – Youth, infrequent vaper, female, Ontario

Some also felt that disposable devices were affordable and practical since they could be found in most vape shops and corner stores and purchased on a whim. A few participants explained that they lose their device often, and thus a disposable device is a better option, so they do not need to replace the whole pod system which is more expensive. Those less inclined to use disposable devices were concerned with the environmental impact of throwing the device out or felt that, in the long run, pod systems were more cost effective.

*“I actually prefer the disposable ones just because when you go out and stuff like that and you have your vape and it gets lost you can just go buy another one. It's not that big of a deal. It's only like \$10, \$15, right? Compared to a reusable one.”* – Young adult, frequent vaper, female, Manitoba

*“If you lose it like I don't really feel as bad because it's cheaper.”* – Youth, infrequent vaper, female, Ontario

Whereas some infrequent vapers discussed occasionally purchasing disposable devices, many never purchase vaping devices and have never owned one. When they vape, they use a friend's vape that gets passed around in a group. These participants had limited feedback on devices and

rarely expressed any particular preferences since they tended to simply use whatever vaping device their friends happened to have at the time.

*“They always have one on them and like there's no point of me buying one because I'm always with them.”* – Youth, infrequent vaper, male, New Brunswick

Disposable devices are for the most part bought at the same places pod devices are bought.

Overall, whether discussing pod systems or disposable devices, they were generally seen as easy to find and becoming increasingly common in their area. No one in the discussions said it had become more difficult for them in any way. Those who were not of legal age tended to visit a specific vape shop or convenience store they know that does not ask for proof of age.

Some also purchased their vaping products from people they know at school, while others got them from friends or family members, often older siblings or other family members who themselves vape. It was also seen as easy to purchase online or “from other sources,” irrespective of their age.

### Vaping products - liquids and nicotine levels

For those using pod devices, the pods used were those available for their brand of device. As each brand was seen to have enough choice of flavours, everyone felt they found something that they liked in the selection. Many participants said they had found one or two flavours that they preferred and that they generally stuck with. This was similar among those using disposables. Those who did not own their own device, again, were less discerning about the liquids they used.

When asked what type of liquid or pod they used, frequent users also often right away mentioned the nicotine level that their products have. There was a high level of awareness of nicotine content among frequent users, many of whom specified they currently consume vaping products with 2% or 2.5% nicotine content (or 20 mg/ml – “20 nic”). Frequent users were also acutely aware of the restrictions that were introduced that eliminated availability of products with 5% content (“50 nic”). While some (mostly more frequent vapers), especially those who had been vaping longer, mentioned that they preferred the higher nicotine levels and felt that the lower levels had less of an effect on them in terms of either satisfying their cravings or addiction, or in getting them the head rush they desired, others said that they preferred the more mellow effects of the lower nicotine levels. Using the lower levels also made them less likely to feel sick, especially when vaping in the morning or on an empty stomach.

Despite a high level of awareness that nicotine is the addictive ingredient in vaping, most seemed comfortable with the levels of nicotine currently available on the market. That said, there was some interest, especially among frequent users, in reducing either the nicotine level of the



products they vape or in reducing how much they vape overall. These participants were primarily motivated for health reasons. Even among those who said they preferred the higher nicotine levels, many admitted that the reduction in nicotine content was probably for the best. Despite these intentions, many of the participants interested in reducing their nicotine consumption or overall vaping frequency explained that this reduction would be difficult, again mostly because they feel they are addicted.

*“I do want to quit so it's like obviously the nicotine levels now matter more than they did before.”* – Young adult, Frequent user, Male, New Brunswick

On the other hand, some have taken steps to find vaping products with higher nicotine content than what is legally available in their province. In anticipation of the ban on products with higher nicotine levels, some stocked up in bulk, whether from the store or online. Others say they are still able to get products with higher levels of nicotine, whether from stores where they have built a special relationship, from friends or other personal sources, or online.

Other than knowing that there is nicotine in what they vape, infrequent vapers were much less aware of the specific nicotine level in the products they vape.

The rate at which participants replaced their pods, refilled their vape or purchased another disposable device was, understandably, quite different between frequent and infrequent user groups. As well, even within the frequent vaper segment, habits were different.

- Frequent users would typically replace their pod or disposable device every few days, with only a few indicating that a pod or a device would last them a week or longer. Some very frequent vapers said they would (sometimes) use a pod a day. Some mentioned that they went through periods of time when they vaped more or less, and that they would therefore have to replace their pods more or less frequently. This could, for example, be the difference between “more social” summer months and “less social” winter months, or between stressful exam periods and other times during a semester.
- Among infrequent users, a disposable device or a single pod could last anywhere from a week to a month. There was also greater variability in the answers provided by infrequent users, who often indicated that it would last them longer or shorter, depending on circumstances, for example, whether they were going to be getting together with friends, since a get-together typically meant greater use and/or sharing with others and in those cases, a pod or disposable device might only last them one or two days.

*“If you like go out with people, then I'd say like a day, like one night, but if it was just me, then maybe like a week.”* – Youth, infrequent vaper, female, Ontario

## Product discovery and availability

The most common way that participants discover and try new products is through their friends and social networks. Less commonly, new products are discovered when visiting vape shops where they might receive a recommendation from a sales representative, they might be presented with a promotion, or they might spot a new product on the shelf themselves.

Very few recalled seeing any sort of advertising for new vaping products other than in vape shops and occasionally on social media. For those who saw it on social media, it was most likely TikTok or Instagram, and it could have been an actual paid advertisement or influencers promoting a product “on their own accord” – these lines were often blurred. A few participants mentioned that they see promotional teams in clubs or bars who advertise a brand and often give away samples or devices. A few also mentioned they signed up for email newsletters from their vape shop or with the manufacturer of their device and receive new information on products that way.

Rather than official advertisements, most participants discussed hearing about products through word of mouth from their friends, or just seeing what other students at school were using. One felt this made actual advertisements unnecessary.

*“I don’t think they usually advertise their things just ‘cause the kids do it for them. People in high school... they just show their friends and they’re like ‘Oh, I want one’. They don’t really need advertising.”* – Youth, frequent vaper, female, British Columbia

In terms of overall availability of vaping products, as noted earlier, many participants have been noticing that vape shops are becoming increasingly common in their area.

*“There are more vape shops and stuff like that available than before.”* – Young adult, Frequent vaper, Female, Nova Scotia

Many also felt that vaping products are typically sold at most convenience stores in their area. Overall, nearly all participants believed that finding and purchasing their preferred vaping products has become easier and very few feel they face any particular challenge in buying what they want.

## Current vaping patterns

When asked how their vaping patterns had changed over time, for many infrequent users, there was no big evolution. It had started mainly as “a social thing” to do with others, and this was still the case. Among frequent vapers, there were many who said they started slowly and in social settings as well, and then progressed to vaping more often, and no longer only in social settings.

*“I used to only do it socially. Now, I’ll do it myself.”* – Young adult, frequent vaper, female, Manitoba

Among this latter group, there were also those who said that they had, at times, made the conscious decision to vape less or tried to quit, although they often reverted to old patterns of heavier use due to being around others who vape, or particularly when attending a social gathering where many others are vaping. One participant mentioned they had stopped vaping but decided to buy a disposable vape before attending a party with the intentions of quitting again once the disposable ran out. However, they eventually went through a couple more disposables before deciding to buy a pod system again as they got back into the habit of vaping regularly.

In this part of the discussion, participants were asked to talk about what a typical day looks like when they vape, and how vaping fits into that day.

Vaping patterns varied a great deal among participants and were distinctly different between frequent and infrequent vapers. Typically, frequent vapers will vape each day and at various points throughout the day and will not limit their vaping to a social or group setting where others are also vaping. They do not seek specific circumstances to vape – many will vape whenever they get the chance, or whenever they crave it. Many of these participants view their vaping habits as a regular part of their daily routine.

A typical common time to vape is after a meal. Frequent vapers will also often vape early in the morning, as this is the time that they either crave it the most or where it has the most effect. They will continue to vape throughout the day, with each session involving two to three puffs and typically lasting no more than a few minutes. Among very frequent vapers, there were also those who felt they “always had it in their hands” and who would not quantify their use in sessions or in number of puffs.

In terms of the company they keep, frequent vapers are just as likely to vape when they are by themselves as when they are with their friends or coworkers – who may or may not be vaping themselves. Some felt they are especially likely to vape if they are bored (when their hands are empty/not doing anything else, or when they are driving, for example) or conversely, when they are having some drinks with their friends.

*“I get like really fidgety so it's just something to have in my hands.” – Youth, frequent vaper, female, British Columbia*

*“I would vape either when I'm like super social, going out and doing something, or I would vape if I'm super, super bored and alone and like at home.” – Youth, infrequent vaper, female, Ontario*

It is also commonly used as stress relief, with a number of students noting that they vape more often during exam time. Online school has also had an impact on some high school and university students who say they vape more when online instead of in an in-person school setting.

Typically, infrequent vapers are social vapers – they will only vape when they are with their friends, particularly at social gatherings or, for younger participants, at school. This pattern is in part largely driven by the fact that they do not own their own vaping products and will only vape what their friends have. Given this context, infrequent vapers are also more likely to say they will vape when they are drinking alcohol since this is another activity they tend to do with their friends. When they are at school, they will vape with their friends during bathroom breaks, during recess or during any other time of the day when they might be with friends. Vaping tends to be something that “just happens” rather than being an activity that is craved or sought out with any great degree of effort – in some ways it could be seen as convenience vaping. Their usage patterns are also driven by the fact that they are less likely to be or feel addicted and are less likely to crave it as much as frequent vapers do.

Many infrequent vapers might only vape on weekends or on a few weekends in a typical month. Similarly, for those attending school, it might occur a few times a week. When they vape, it is either short sessions (such as during a bathroom break) involving two or three puffs, or it involves an entire evening with one or two puffs taken repeatedly throughout the evening. Other infrequent vapers who do own their device will also vape for “something to do” if they are bored, but do not feel compelled to use this device everyday.

*“I would vape either when I'm like super social, going out and doing something, or I would vape if I'm super, super bored and alone and like at home but it's not something that I really do on like a day-to-day basis.” – Youth, infrequent vaper, female, Ontario*

## Reasons for vaping

As an initial exercise in this part of the conversation about why people vape, participants were asked to describe their relationship with vaping. Quite a few participants, particularly more frequent vapers, described mixed feelings about it. They would for example call it “love-hate” or “push-pull,” explaining that they don’t necessarily love the fact that they vape or are addicted, but at the same time, they derive pleasure from it. Other frequent vapers simply said it was “habit” or “addiction.” Some used words describing the effects of vaping to describe their habit, such as “relaxing,” “calming” or “head rush.” Others, particularly those who vaped less frequently, would say “social” or “on and off,” describing the frequency or occasions they associate with vaping.

Similar to many research findings in this study, some results pertaining to the reasons for vaping were fairly different between frequent and infrequent vapers.

Frequent vapers were much more inclined to explain that they vape because “it’s there,” it’s a habit, or because they feel they are addicted. For many, this has shifted from their initial reasons

to try vaping for social reasons or just “for fun.” However, in this group there are also still those, especially among high school students, who say they vape to fit in with their peers.

Some frequent vapers also explained that vaping provides a form of stress relief or helps them disconnect, which, in their opinion, is helpful for their mental health. For instance, some feel vaping helps them relax when they get stressed over school assignments or over their academic workload in general.

*“I think it really helps with if I feel stressed after a long day, it relaxes me and reduces my anxiety. Yeah, so it just makes me crave it and want to increase how much I smoke.” –*

Young adult, frequent vaper, female, Manitoba

This group described their reasons for vaping as “calming nerves,” “will get crabby if I don’t use it,” “anxiety-reducing,” “pick-me-up,” “for the head rush,” “to fit in socially,” “stress-relieving,” “to help with nicotine craving,” “because I’m addicted,” or because it’s “part of the routine.”

*“It’s just almost a pick me up [...] kind of wakes me up. Keeps me alert, like a rush, a temporary rush.” –* Young adult, frequent vaper, male, Manitoba

Infrequent users were more inclined to explain that they vape because their friends vape and that it is an activity that they do when they get together. Many will vape to either “fit in” or to share in a fun collective experience. This group was more likely to describe their reasons for vaping as “to fit in,” “for fun” or as something they do at a particular time of day or occasion, such as to “unwind at the end of the day” “to calm down after class,” “during exams” or “when I’m driving.”

Among both segments, there were those who said they aren’t sure why they vape, or, upon reflection, said that their reasons for vaping are not really “good” reasons at all. They would say they started because of peer pressure or to fit in, which was no longer their reason.

Participants in both segments liked that vaping gives them a head rush (“headie”) or makes them feel good. The main difference between frequent and infrequent vapers on this front is that infrequent vapers enjoy this feeling if and when the opportunity presents itself, and in some cases only in social gatherings and parties whereas frequent users are more likely to seek this feeling repeatedly throughout the course of any given day. There were also those among the frequent vaper groups, particularly those who had been vaping for a longer period of time, who said that this may have been what they were chasing in the past, but they either only got the head rush first thing in the morning or that they did not get it anymore.

*“It started out like chasing that head rush feeling and now it’s more avoid cravings [for nicotine].” –* Young adult, frequent vaper, male, Alberta

*“With a lot of my friends, it's like they used to do it for the head rush, and now, because they do it so much, they can't get the head rush anymore so like they're like trying to like chase after that.”* – Youth, infrequent vaper, male, Ontario

Otherwise, a few vapers explained that they vape because they enjoy the activity, they enjoy “blowing clouds” or “seeing the smoke” and they enjoy the taste of their favourite flavours.

*“I like seeing the smoke, honestly, and the head rush.”* – Youth, infrequent vaper, male, Ontario

### A focus on flavours

Among both frequent and infrequent vapers, flavours do tend to represent an important element in the overall vaping experience, with some saying they would not see the point in vaping if the liquid was flavourless. The flavours are also described as a key driver of what makes vaping interesting or attractive. Specific flavours or the range of flavours available were often listed as one of the main reasons that some participants choose a certain type of device to vape over another, or the reason why they switch devices. Flavours are also described as a popular topic of discussion among vapers, and they are curious to discover or experiment with new ones. Flavours are also what sets vaping apart from smoking cigarettes, which only come in one flavour.

It was clear that, to vapers, there is a difference from one flavour to another. Flavours are typically chosen based on what tastes they like “in real life.” When presented with the choices, they would first gravitate towards something that appeals to them – if apples are their favourite fruit, then they would try an apple-flavoured vape pod. While this often worked out, there were also those who said that they had had some flavours that were not true to what they would expect from it based on what the flavour was supposed to be, or who said they had been disappointed, or conversely, pleasantly surprised that they liked a certain vape flavour that they would not necessarily expect they would enjoy based on what it was supposed to simulate. After initial experimentation, many vapers have very specific and entrenched preferences regarding which flavours they will vape. Some remain open to trying new flavours that become available.

Although a few did prefer mint or menthol-flavoured liquids, most of the vapers who felt strongly about their flavours tended to opt for fruity or sweet flavours, such as strawberry banana, blueberry, or watermelon. “Ice” or flavours that combined a fruity flavour with some menthol were also popular, and was sometimes said to enhance the potency or head rush, giving it the feel of a higher nicotine level.

Some had tried “knock off” flavours or brands that they did not like and would stay away from in the future.

## Impact of restrictions on flavours

Overall, it did not appear that flavour regulations or restrictions introduced in the past few years on where they could be sold had had any impact on vaping behaviours or on availability of the products participants wanted to purchase. This was the same among all age groups, and among frequent and infrequent vapers alike.

Very few participants in jurisdictions with restrictions on the sale of flavours seemed to remember those restrictions being introduced. A few mentioned that they recalled restrictions, but these would often be conflated with the ban on higher nicotine vaping products (50 mg/ml). A small number of participants had noticed that gas stations no longer advertised flavours. The main reason for not being aware of restrictions appears to be that participants were still able to easily get the products they wanted to get, and in many cases, more easily than in the past, rather than expressing that it has been more difficult.

In jurisdictions where the restrictions limited the sale of flavoured products to vape shops, this was not really noticed either because this is where participants tended to purchase their products anyways, and more and more vape shops had been popping up. In jurisdictions where flavoured products are not available at all, participants explained that they knew of a few retailers or other sources who were able to get them flavoured products, they ordered their products online, or they “stocked up” on supplies when they traveled to a province with no such restrictions. Nearly nobody produced their own flavoured liquids as a result of the restrictions.

*“I think that once they got banned here... people just kind of started buying them online and stuff... I think people will always find another avenue if they were banned.”* – Young adult, Frequent vaper, male, PEI

While these recently reduced restrictions did not appear to have made much of an impact, when faced with a fictitious scenario involving a complete ban on flavours in the next six months, participants reacted in a variety of different ways, with most saying this would likely have some kind of impact on their vaping behaviour.

The most common feedback was that this would discourage them from vaping as much or would encourage them to stop. It was said that a ban on flavours would take away one of the main reasons, if not the main reason, for vaping. This view was especially prevalent among infrequent vapers. For this group, this seemed to be an easy decision to make, and they felt the objective would be quite achievable since vaping was a very casual activity and they did not feel addicted. For frequent vapers, many also felt they would curtail their vaping although they were less convinced that it would be an easy thing to do, as they felt that their nicotine addiction would make that difficult. Some frequent vapers, especially those who had tried to quit in the past or



who were “always thinking of quitting” said that this would likely be the push they needed to actually quit.

Others would be okay with the elimination of flavours and would continue to vape unabated since the feeling and/or nicotine they get when they vape, whether this is the head rush or the calm, is more important than the flavour.

The effectiveness of a ban on flavours was also questioned. Some believed they would still be able to find their favourite flavours through “connections” they have or through some of the retailers they have already been using. They did not seem to think they would be difficult to find despite any new restrictions. A few would resort to online ordering or to getting it from people they know in other jurisdictions.

*“I would definitely not vape or I would go like online and try to find like sketchy websites that like sell flavoured stuff... The tobacco [flavour] is just not appealing at all.”* – Youth, infrequent vaper, female, Ontario

Some spoke of finding replacements for vaping if flavours were banned. A few would switch to cigarettes. This option was typically only mentioned by those who had smoked in the past and often started vaping as a way to reduce or quit smoking cigarettes, indicating this would more likely be a “switch back” option rather than an entirely new option.

*“I think I would either quit or I would go back to smoking cigarettes if my nicotine cravings were still there.”* – Young adult, infrequent vaper, female, British Columbia

*“Weed vapes don't really have any flavours to them other than the weed. So, I would probably just use my weed pen or otherwise smoke an actual cigarette or a joint.”* – Young adult, frequent vaper, female, Manitoba

A few participants also mentioned they would likely use a hookah or shisha more than they do now, given that those also have flavours. This again was only mentioned by those who already use this, rather than by those who do not currently use it and who would start to use it as a result of a flavour ban.

*“I also already smoked shisha which is flavoured and weed so I would just resort to those.”*  
– Youth, infrequent vaper, female, Saskatchewan

Some social vapers could see themselves using cannabis (more) at parties instead of vaping. Nearly none of the participants would resort to producing their own liquids.

Many did seem to know at least a few people in their circle of friends who would probably be discouraged from vaping if all flavours were banned. Some also felt that banning flavours would



be an effective way to discourage “kids” from vaping since many seemed to notice that vaping had become increasingly popular among younger students. In that same vein, some mentioned that it may discourage young people from starting to vape and therefore make it less popular and prevalent.

### Multiuse and substance use chronology

Co-use was fairly common among both frequent and infrequent vapers, with alcohol and vaping being the most popular combination.

*“Substances like drinking and vaping goes together so nicely. Like when you're drinking and then you get like a hit of a vape and the nicotine and the alcohol just goes so nicely.” –*

Youth, frequent vaper, male, Alberta

Quite a few vapers also mentioned consuming cannabis, although this was mostly not done at the same time but rather as separate activities. While a few consumed cannabis by vaping, this was mostly done by smoking or using edibles. As well, those who vape cannabis tend to use a separate device (such as a dab pen). Not very many participants also smoked cigarettes, while shisha or hookah use was mentioned in a number of groups by one or two participants.

As an introductory exercise, participants were asked to provide a chronology of their substance use with a focus on the following: tobacco (especially cigarettes), nicotine (vaping), alcohol, cannabis and other recreational drugs. This included discussing when they started each substance that they use or used, when they stopped, and how their use progressed over time. While this was very individual, some of the overarching trends noticed through this exercise included the following:

- Alcohol was often one of the first substances consumed, which would often happen at ages of 13 to 17 years. For a few, cigarette smoking also tended to start with the use of alcohol.
- Either vaping or cannabis tended to be the next substance started, often seen in the 14 to 18 years old range. These substances were usually added to the use of alcohol rather than replacing anything although for a few, vaping replaced or reduced the use of cigarettes or cannabis replaced alcohol use.

*“Somewhere in grade 10 like I was still smoking cigarettes and then like my friends were saying, oh, like switch to vaping, it's better for you and stuff like that, and then so I made that switch and then ever since, I just haven't really stopped.” – Youth, infrequent vaper, female, Ontario*

- Starting vaping was usually mentioned as “I tried it first when...,” describing when they may have taken their first puff. This does not necessarily mean that it was a constant habit right

from the beginning – it was often mentioned that their use became heavier in the next year or two, or that they only started buying it themselves, or invested in a device, months or even a year or two after that initial introduction.

- There has been some stability in the use of these substances since late teens other than perhaps vaping, which, especially for frequent vapers, has increased over time. In a few cases among some of the older frequent vapers, there has been a reduction in alcohol use and vaping, mostly because their circle of friends and their social life have changed. Some of these vapers have also made a conscious decision to reduce their use of these substances recognizing that they are having a detrimental effect on their health.
- Those who started consuming cannabis after they had started vaping did not believe that one activity led to the other – they feel they would have started consuming cannabis irrespective. Some had tried cannabis at some point but did not like the effect it had on them and consequently did not use it again. For a few, this led to vaping since they wanted a non-cannabis option to pair with alcohol, or they preferred vaping because the effects are more short term, rather than the longer-lasting high of cannabis.

*“I hate not being able to control myself when I'm high. Being drunk is a little different, but with nicotine, you only have a head rush for about like 30 seconds and then you're done.” –*

– Youth, infrequent vaper, female, British Columbia

- Cigarettes were rarely used overall, with many saying they are not at all interested in cigarettes and find them disgusting. One of the reasons they chose to vape over smoking cigarettes has to do with their dislike of the smell of the cigarettes and because smoking cigarettes is more difficult to hide because of the smell. There is also a perception that smoking is much worse for one's health than vaping.
- A few participants mentioned also using hookah or shisha, which had typically started in high school or shortly thereafter. This was mostly done with family or friends and not in combination with other substance use.
- There was some, but very little mention of other recreational drugs such as MDMA/ecstasy/molly, or “other pills.”

### Changing substance use patterns

When discussing quitting of any of the substances in the past, quite a few frequent vapers indicated they had tried to and sometimes succeeded to quit vaping for a short time, from a few weeks to a few months. Those who decided to cut back or quit typically mentioned they had friends who were also doing the same which motivated them, or they were cutting back due to

the health impacts and uncertainty of long-term effects. Some had quit smoking cigarettes, while quitting alcohol or cannabis use was very uncommon.

Over the coming years, very few participants expect their use of any of the given substances to increase. Exceptions were some of the younger participants who suspected their use of alcohol might increase when they attend post-secondary education, and a few infrequent vapers who suspected their vaping might increase since they feel they are slowly becoming addicted to it.

The most common intended shift in substance use over the coming years is likely going to be a reduction or stoppage in vaping among frequent vapers. A few have already started to make efforts to limit their vaping and although success may ebb and flow, they are planning to eventually stop vaping altogether. There was a sense that “older people just don’t vape” and that they will eventually age out of it too. Seeing themselves vaping into adulthood brought on some chuckles in a number of groups, as some had the perception that vaping after a certain age (for example, 25) was uncool. It was said that the social reason for vaping would no longer be there as they got older or got into a career.

*“When I see someone that’s a lot older [vaping], it just kind of looks weird. I feel like I definitely won’t do it at that age. So, I think it’ll fade as like I get out of high school and university and stuff, like it’ll be less around me.”* – Youth, frequent vaper, male, Nova Scotia

It was said that the social reason for vaping would no longer be there as they got older or got into a career. Another reason for quitting vaping mentioned by a few was wanting to start a family or wanting to be an example for their kids or others.

A few of the participants who are using vaping as a strategy to help them stop smoking cigarettes also expect their use of tobacco (and their nicotine addiction) to gradually end and with that their vaping. It was more likely that participants expected they would stop vaping at some point in the near future than that they would stop their cannabis use. In fact, among cannabis users, it was more seen as a lifestyle that they would continue indefinitely, rather than something they would ever want to stop.

Family members (parents, siblings) or partners were the most likely to speak to vapers about quitting. However, there were also those who said that the outside pressure to quit was not very strong or constant, and that parents in particular let vaping happen or even actively encouraged it because it was seen as being better than smoking cigarettes.

### Perceptions regarding the health impacts of vaping

Many feel that society has become increasingly receptive to vaping, especially as an alternative to smoking cigarettes. While most will frown on younger children vaping, there is a sense that older

teens and adults vaping is much less of a concern compared to when vaping first appeared. There is also not a strong sense that vaping is a gateway drug.

Participants are aware of some undercurrents of concern, especially in light of media coverage of serious illnesses and deaths associated with vaping, such as a “popcorn lung.” They believe this has tended to shape some of the opinions of friends and family who look less favourably on their vaping. However, for the most part, the health effects that many frequent vapers in particular notice, is shortness of breath when doing activities, sports, or sometimes even daily activities (such as walking up stairs) that in the past they would not have any issues with. While this is often seen as a minor health effect or more of a nuisance than anything else, it was often mentioned as something of concern, and as something that made them believe that vaping is not good for their lungs or cardiovascular health.

That said, participants tend to agree that there is a lack of scientific evidence suggesting that vaping is detrimental to their health in the short or long term and until such evidence appears, many are not overly concerned about their health. Lack of concern is particularly noticeable among infrequent vapers who do not feel any negative effects themselves, and who emphasized that they do not vape nearly enough to warrant any such concern.

By and large participants would not consider themselves well informed about the health impacts of vaping. Very few have had any conversations with anyone, including a healthcare provider, regarding the health impacts of vaping and few have proactively sought this type of information on their own. For one frequent vaper who had taken steps to research this information, they felt that these potential negative health effects were not of concern.

*“I think it's pretty stigmatized, especially people who aren't knowledgeable about it. I've done a bunch of research into it, I'm not particularly concerned about any negative health effects.”* – Young adult, frequent vaper, male, Alberta

A few were aware of some advertisements regarding the ill effects of vaping and of media coverage of some vapers being hospitalized but this has not done much to dissuade them. Very few had seen others have serious health effects.

There was some sense that time would tell how bad the effects really are, and that, much like with smoking cigarettes, there would likely come a time when there will be more evidence of detrimental health effects, particularly of prolonged use. Since vaping is still in its infancy, those potential long-terms effects are simply not yet known – and the absence of evidence does not dissuade most vapers from continuing its use, at least for now.

Those most likely to have taken some form of action to curb or end their vaping are those who believe they can only benefit from stopping (e.g., they have either experienced some sort of

physical impact, especially shortness of breath when doing physical activity or when going up a flight of stairs, or those who believe that any sort of addiction or activity that involves inhaling a foreign substance cannot be good for one's health).

## Methodology

**Overview:** The research methodology consisted of 16 online focus groups with youth and young adults from across the country. Research was conducted between May 16<sup>th</sup> and June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022 and a total of 124 participants participated in the focus groups.

Quorus was responsible for coordinating all aspects of the research project including working with Health Canada in designing and translating the recruitment screener and the moderation guide, coordinating all aspects of data collection logistics, including participant recruitment, providing the online focus group platform and moderating all focus groups and delivering required reports at the end of data collection. The research approach is outlined in greater detail below.

### Target audience and sample frame

The target audience for this research study consisted of the following four segments:

- Youth (aged 15-19) frequent vapers (vaped on at least 20 days of the past 30 days)
- Youth (aged 15-19) infrequent vapers (vaped on fewer than 20 days of the past 30 days)
- Young adults (aged 20-24) frequent vapers (vaped on at least 20 days of the past 30 days)
- Young adults (aged 20-24) infrequent vapers (vaped on fewer than 20 days of the past 30 days)

Additionally, the four segments were recruited from the following two regions:

- Those living in regions with restrictions on the sale of flavours (Ontario, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia)
- Those living in regions with no restrictions on the sale of flavours (Quebec, Newfoundland, Manitoba, Alberta, and the Territories)

In the design of the recruitment screener, specific questions were inserted to clearly identify whether participants qualified for the research program and to ensure, where applicable, a good representation by age, region, gender, education level, and ethnicity. As well, on a best-effort basis, recruitment aimed for individuals who also smoke cigarettes (dual-users) in each group.

In addition to the general participant profiling criteria noted above, additional screening measures to ensure quality respondents include the following:

- No participant (nor anyone in their immediate family or household) was recruited who worked in related government departments/agencies, nor in advertising, marketing research, public relations, a tobacco or e-cigarette company, a smoking cessation company, a legal or law firm, a cannabis-related company, or the media (radio, television, newspaper, film/video production, etc.).
- No participant acquainted with another participant was knowingly recruited for the same study, unless they were recruited into separately scheduled sessions.

- No participant was recruited who had attended a qualitative research session within the past six months.
- No participant was recruited who had attended five or more qualitative research sessions in the past five years.
- No participant was recruited who had attended a qualitative research session on the same general topic as defined by the Researcher/Moderator in the past two years.

### Description of data collection procedures

Data collection consisted of online focus groups with youth and young adult vapers. Each focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes.

For each focus group, Quorus recruited 10 participants with the goal of achieving 8-10 participants per session. All focus group participants were offered an honorarium of \$100 after their session.

Participants invited to participate in the focus groups were recruited by telephone through random digit dialing of the general public as well as through the use of a proprietary opt-in database.

The recruitment of participants followed the screening, recruiting and privacy considerations as set out in the *Standards for the Conduct of Government of Canada Public Opinion Research—Qualitative Research*. Furthermore, recruitment respected the following requirements:

- All recruitment was conducted in the participant's official language of choice, English and French, as appropriate.
- Upon request, participants were informed on how they can access the research findings.
- Upon request, participants were provided Quorus' privacy policy.
- Recruitment confirmed each participant had the ability to speak, understand, read and write in the language in which the session was to be conducted.
- Participants were informed of their rights under the *Privacy and Access to Information Acts* and ensure that those rights were protected throughout the research process. This included: informing participants of the purpose of the research, identifying both the sponsoring department or agency and research supplier, informing participants that the study will be made available to the public in 6 months after field completion through Library and Archives Canada, and informing participants that their participation in the study is voluntary and the information provided will be administered according to the requirements of the *Privacy Act*.

At the recruitment stage and at the beginning of each focus group, participants were informed that the research was being conducted for the Government of Canada/Health Canada. Participants were informed of the audio/video recording of their session and of the presence of Health Canada observers. Quorus ensured that prior consent was obtained at the recruitment stage and before participants began their focus group.

All online focus groups were conducted in the evening after regular business hours. The research team used the Zoom platform to host and record focus group sessions (through microphones and webcams connected to the moderator and participants electronic devices, such as their laptop, tablet or smartphone) enabling client remote viewing.

### Online focus groups

A total of 16 online focus groups were conducted across Canada between May 16<sup>th</sup> and June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022. The details of these groups are outlined in the table below.

Date	Time (EST)	Region	Segment	Language	Number of participants
<b>Monday May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022</b>	5:00 PM	ON/NS/PEI/NB	Young adults (20-24) - Frequent vapers	English	7
	7:00 PM	NFLD/ MB/ AB/ Territories	Young adults (20-24) - Frequent vapers	English	7
<b>Tuesday May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022</b>	5:00 PM	ON/NS/PEI/NB	Young adults (20-24) - Infrequent vapers	English	8
	7:00 PM	NFLD/ MB/ AB/ Territories	Young adults (20-24) - Infrequent vapers	English	9
<b>Wednesday May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022</b>	5:00 PM	ON/NS/PEI/NB	Youth (15-19) - Frequent vapers	English	9
	7:00 PM	NFLD/ MB/ AB/ Territories	Youth (15-19) - Frequent vapers	English	9
<b>Thursday May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022</b>	5:00 PM	ON/NS/PEI/NB	Youth (15-19) - Infrequent vapers	English	5
	7:00 PM	NFLD/ MB/ AB/ Territories	Youth (15-19) - Infrequent vapers	English	6
<b>Tuesday May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022</b>	8:00 PM	BC/SK	Youth (15-19) - Frequent vapers	English	9
	10:00 PM	BC/SK	Young adults (20-24) - Frequent vapers	English	9
<b>Wednesday May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2022</b>	8:00 PM	BC/SK	Youth (15-19) - Infrequent vapers	English	10
	10:00 PM	BC/SK	Young adults (20-24) - Infrequent vapers	English	9
<b>Wednesday June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022</b>	5:00 PM	Quebec	Young adults (20-24) - Frequent vapers	French	6
	7:00 PM	Quebec	Young adults (20-24) - Infrequent vapers	French	7
<b>Tuesday June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022</b>	5:00 PM	Quebec	Youth (15-19) - Frequent vapers	French	8



	7:00 PM	Quebec	Youth (15-19) - Infrequent vapers	French	6
					<b>TOTAL: 124</b>

# Appendices

## Recruitment Screener

### Health Canada – Exploring Youth and Young Adults’ Use of Vaping Products Focus Group Screener

#### Specifications

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- 16 focus groups will be conducted with young vapers and youth in the following four regions:
  - ON/NS/PEI/NB
  - BC/SK
  - Quebec
  - NFLD/ MB/ AB/ Territories
- Recruit 10 participants per group, for 8-10 to show
- Participants to be paid \$100
- 4 groups in each region will be held with the split based on participants’ age and vaping frequency, with one group designated to each of the following segments:
  - Youth (aged 15-19) frequent vapers (vaped on at least 20 days of the past 30 days)
  - Youth (aged 15-19) infrequent vapers (vaped on fewer than 20 days of the past 30 days)
  - Young adults (aged 20-24) frequent vapers (vaped on at least 20 days of the past 30 days)
  - Young adults (aged 20-24) infrequent vapers (vaped on fewer than 20 days of the past 30 days)
- Groups will last ~90 minutes

#### **IMPORTANT:**

- **IF A HOUSEHOLD HAS MEMBERS WHO FALL INTO MORE THAN ONE OF “YOUNG”, OR “YOUTH” CATEGORIES, WE WANT TO AVOID RECRUITING TWO PEOPLE FROM THE SAME HOUSEHOLD – WE CAN RECRUIT ONE AS A BACKUP IF THEY WOULD BE IN SEPARATE GROUPS. IT IS DEFINITELY NOT ALLOWED IF THEY WOULD BE IN THE SAME FOCUS GROUP.**
- **A PARENTAL CONSENT FORM IS REQUIRED FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS 15 AND 16 YEARS OLD**

**All times are stated in local area time unless specified otherwise.**

**Group 1**  
**ON/NS/PEI/NB**  
May 16  
5:00 pm EDT  
**Young adults (20-24)**  
**Frequent vapers**

**Group 5**  
**ON/NS/PEI/NB**  
May 18  
5:00 pm EDT  
**Youth (15-19)**  
**Frequent vapers**

**Group 9**  
**BC/SK**  
May 24  
5:00 pm PDT  
**Youth (15-19)**  
**Frequent vapers**

**Group 13 [FRENCH]**  
**Quebec**  
June 7  
5:00 pm EDT  
**Youth (15-19)**  
**Frequent vapers**

**Group 2**  
**NFLD/ MB/ AB/ Territories**  
May 16  
5:00 pm MDT  
**Young adults (20-24)**  
**Frequent vapers**

**Group 6**  
**NFLD/ MB/ AB/ Territories**  
May 18  
5:00 pm MDT  
**Youth (15-19)**  
**Frequent vapers**

**Group 10**  
**BC/SK**  
May 24  
7:00 pm PDT  
**Young adults (20-24)**  
**Frequent vapers**

**Group 14 [FRENCH]**  
**Quebec**  
June 7  
7:00 pm EDT  
**Youth (15-19)**  
**Infrequent vapers**

**Group 3**  
**ON/NS/PEI/NB**  
May 17  
5:00 pm EDT  
**Young adults (20-24)**  
**Infrequent vapers**

**Group 7**  
**ON/NS/PEI/NB**  
May 19  
5:00 pm EDT  
**Youth (15-19)**  
**Infrequent vapers**

**Group 11**  
**BC/SK**  
May 25  
5:00 pm PDT  
**Youth (15-19)**  
**Infrequent vapers**

**Group 15 [FRENCH]**  
**Quebec**  
June 1  
5:00 pm EDT  
**Young adults (20-24)**  
**Frequent vapers**

**Group 4**  
**NFLD/ MB/ AB/ Territories**  
May 17  
5:00 pm MDT  
**Young adults (20-24)**  
**Infrequent vapers**

**Group 8**  
**NFLD/ MB/ AB/ Territories**  
May 19  
5:00 pm MDT  
**Youth (15-19)**  
**Infrequent vapers**

**Group 12**  
**BC/SK**  
May 25  
7:00 pm PDT  
**Young adults (20-24)**  
**Infrequent vapers**

**Group 16 [FRENCH]**  
**Quebec**  
June 1  
7:00 pm EDT  
**Young adults (20-24)**  
**Infrequent vapers**

## Questionnaire

---

### A. Introduction

Hello/Bonjour, my name is [NAME] and I am with Quorus Consulting Group, a Canadian market research company. We're planning a series of discussion groups on behalf of the Government of Canada, specifically Health Canada, with people in your area. Would you prefer to continue in English or French? / Préférez-vous continuer en anglais ou en français?

**[INTERVIEWER NOTE: FOR ENGLISH GROUPS, IF PARTICIPANT WOULD PREFER TO CONTINUE IN FRENCH, PLEASE RESPOND WITH, "Malheureusement, nous recherchons des gens qui parlent anglais pour participer à ces groupes de discussion. Nous vous remercions de votre intérêt." FOR FRENCH GROUPS, IF PARTICIPANT WOULD PREFER TO CONTINUE IN ENGLISH, PLEASE RESPOND WITH, "Unfortunately, we are looking for people who speak French to participate in this discussion group. We thank you for your interest."]**

**[INTERVIEWER NOTE 2: During the recruiting, if someone from the Quebec region asks to participate in English, or if someone from another region outside Quebec asks to participate in French, efforts will be made to include them in a group in their preferred language in the nearest time zone to where they live, provided it is in a region with the same level of flavour restrictions:**

- **French-speaking participants from NL/MB/AB/Territories can be included in their equivalent French Quebec session, and,**
- **English-speaking participants from Quebec can be included in their equivalent session with participants from NL/ MB/ AB/ Territories.**

**For all other situations, please consult your supervisor.]**

As I was saying – we are planning a series of discussion groups on behalf of the Government of Canada with people in your area. The groups will last up to 90 minutes and people who take part will receive a cash gift to thank them for their time.

Participation is completely voluntary. We are interested in your opinions. No attempt will be made to sell you anything or change your point of view. The format is a group discussion held using an online web conferencing platform similar to Zoom, led by a research professional with about eight to ten other participants invited the same way you are being invited. The use of a computer, a tablet or a smartphone with functioning microphone and webcam in a quiet room is necessary for participation. All opinions will remain anonymous and will be used for research purposes only in accordance with laws designed to protect your privacy.

**[INTERVIEWER NOTE: IF ASKED ABOUT PRIVACY LAWS, SAY: "The information collected through the research is subject to the provisions of the *Privacy Act*, legislation of the Government of Canada, and to the provisions of relevant provincial privacy legislation.]**

1. Before we invite anyone to attend, we need to ask you a few questions to ensure that we get a good mix of people in each of the groups. This will take 5 minutes. May I continue?

Yes	1	<b>CONTINUE</b>
No	2	<b>THANK/DISCONTINUE</b>

## **B. Qualification**

### **FOR GROUPS INVOLVING YOUTH 15-16 YEARS OLD**

---

2. Are you the parent or guardian of a child who is 15 to 16 years old or is there someone else in the household who is? If so, may I speak with this person?

No	1	
Yes, self	2	<b>GO TO YOUTH 15-24 SCREENER SECTION</b>
Yes, someone else	3	<b>ASK TO SPEAK TO THAT PERSON AND REPEAT INTRO</b>

### **FOR GROUPS INVOLVING YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS 17-24 YEARS OLD**

---

3. Is anyone in your household between 17 to 24 years old? If so, may I speak with this person?

No	1	<b>THANK/DISCONTINUE</b>
Yes, self	2	<b>GO TO Q9 IN YOUTH 15-24 SCREENER SECTION</b>
Yes, someone else	3	<b>ASK TO SPEAK TO THIS PERSON AND REPEAT INTRO</b>

## **C. SCREENER QUESTIONS**

### **15-24 YEARS OLD VAPERS**

#### **ASK PARENTS OR GUARDIANS OF YOUTH 15-16 YEARS OLD:**

We are conducting a research study for Health Canada that includes youth 15 to 24 years of age. The study is being conducted to help inform policy and regulatory decision making as well as gaining a better understanding of the phenomenon of vaping among youth. For this study, we're organizing online discussion groups which are scheduled to run for 1.5 hours in the late afternoon and evening (during the day if Saturday). The format is a group discussion held using an online web conferencing platform similar to Zoom, led by a research professional with about eight to ten other teens. Participants will be asked to share their views on vaping and vaping behaviors. All opinions will remain anonymous and participation is voluntary. Those who take part will receive \$100 for their time. The information collected will be used for research purposes only and handled according to the *Privacy Act* of Canada. The full name of your child will not be provided to the government or any other third party.

4. May we have your permission to ask your child some questions, including questions about their possible vaping behaviours, if any, to see if he or she qualifies for the discussion group which will take place on **[INSERT DATE]** at **[TIME]**?

- |                                |   |                     |
|--------------------------------|---|---------------------|
| Yes                            | 1 |                     |
| No                             | 2 | <b>RETURN TO Q3</b> |
| Yes but they are not available | 3 | <b>RESCHEDULE</b>   |

Thank you. Before I speak with your child, I have a few more questions for you.

5. Do you, or any member of your immediate family, work for ...? **[READ LIST]**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| ...a marketing research, public relations, or advertising firm? | 1 |
| ...the media (radio, television, newspapers, magazines, etc.)?  | 2 |
| ...the federal or provincial government?                        | 3 |
| ...a tobacco or e-cigarette company?                            | 4 |
| ...a smoking cessation company?                                 | 5 |
| ...a legal or law firm?   | 6 |
| ...a cannabis-related company?                                  | 7 |

**IF YES TO ANY, THANK AND TERMINATE**

6. The discussion group will be video-recorded. These recordings are used to help analyze the findings and write the report. The results from the discussions will be grouped together in the research report, which means that individuals will not be identified in anyway. Your child's name will not appear in the research report. Is this acceptable?

- |     |   |                            |
|-----|---|----------------------------|
| Yes | 1 |                            |
| No  | 2 | <b>THANK AND TERMINATE</b> |

7. There may be some people from Health Canada and others involved in this project observing the session. They will not take part in the discussion and they will not know your child's name. Is this acceptable?

- |     |   |                            |
|-----|---|----------------------------|
| Yes | 1 |                            |
| No  | 2 | <b>THANK AND TERMINATE</b> |

8. What is your child's first name? **RECORD:** \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you. Now I would like to speak to **[INSERT NAME OF CHILD]** to make sure they are interested and feels comfortable about taking part in a group discussion. Once I've done that, I would like to speak to you again.

## ASK YOUTH 15-16 YEARS OLD

Hi [INSERT NAME OF CHILD], I'm [RECRUITER] of Quorus Consulting Group, a Canadian research company. Your mother/father/guardian gave me permission to talk to you about a research study.

We are conducting online focus group research for Health Canada with young people ages 15 to 24, to help the department gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of vaping among youth. Please note that your responses to this call or your opinions during the focus group will not be shared with anyone, including your parents.

Before we invite you to attend, I need to ask you a few questions to make sure we are getting a good mix of people for each discussion group. This will take 5 minutes. May I continue?

- |     |   |                            |
|-----|---|----------------------------|
| Yes | 1 |                            |
| No  | 2 | <b>THANK AND TERMINATE</b> |

9. Please tell me how frequently did you use an e-cigarette (vape, vape pen, tank or mod) in the last 30 days? **READ LIST**

- |  |   |                            |
|--|---|----------------------------|
| On at least 20 of the past 30 days       | 1 | <b>FREQUENT VAPER</b>      |
| On fewer than 20 of the past 30 days, or | 2 | <b>INFREQUENT VAPER</b>    |
| Not at all in the past 30 days           | 3 | <b>THANK AND TERMINATE</b> |

10. At the present time, do you smoke cigarettes (including cigarettes that are bought ready-made as well as cigarettes that you make yourself with only tobacco) every day, occasionally, or not at all?

- |                |   |                  |
|----------------|---|------------------|
| Every day      | 1 | <b>DUAL-USER</b> |
| Occasionally   | 2 | <b>DUAL-USER</b> |
| Not at all     | 3 |                  |
| Prefer not say | 9 |                  |

**ON A BEST EFFORT BASIS, RECRUIT AT LEAST 1 PARTICIPANT IN THE YOUTH GROUPS (AGE 15-19) AND AT LEAST 2 PARTICIPANTS IN THE YOUNG ADULT GROUPS (20-24) WHO ARE "DUAL USERS"**



I'd like to tell you a little bit more about the study to see if you might be interested in taking part. For this study, we're organizing discussion groups, each of which is scheduled to run for 1.5 hours in the late afternoon or evening (during the day if Saturday). The format is a group discussion held using an online web conferencing platform similar to Zoom, led by a research professional with about eight to ten other young Canadians. Participants will be asked to share their views on vaping and vaping behaviors. All opinions will remain anonymous and participation is voluntary. Those who take part will receive a cash gift for their time. The information collected will be used for research purposes only and handled according to the *Privacy Act* of Canada. The full names of participants will not be provided to the government or any other third party, other than the research firms.

**[INTERVIEWER NOTE: IF ASKED ABOUT PRIVACY LAWS, SAY: "The information collected through the research is subject to the provisions of the *Privacy Act*, legislation of the Government of Canada, and to the provisions of relevant provincial privacy legislation.]**

11. Would you be interested in taking part in this study?

Yes	1	
No	2	<b>THANK AND TERMINATE</b>

12. We are looking to include people of various ages in the group discussion. May I have your age please?

14 or younger		<b>THANK AND TERMINATE</b>
15 years old	1	} Mix of ages
16 years old	2	
17 years old	3	
18 years old	4	
19 years old	5	
20 years old	6	
21 years old	7	
22 years old	8	
23 years old	9	
24 years old	10	
25 or older		<b>THANK AND TERMINATE</b>

13. What is your gender identity? [If you do not feel comfortable disclosing, you do not need to do so] **[DO NOT READ LIST]**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| Male   | 1 |
| Female   | 2 |
| Prefer to self-describe, please specify: _____ | 3 |
| Prefer not to say                              | 4 |

**AIM FOR 50/50 SPLIT OF MALE AND FEMALE, WHILE RECRUITING OTHER GENDER IDENTITIES AS THEY FALL**

14. **ASK 18-24 YEARS OLD:** Do you, or any member of your immediate family, work for ...? **[READ LIST]**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| ...a marketing research, public relations, or advertising firm? | 1 |
| ...the media (radio, television, newspapers, magazines, etc.)?  | 2 |
| ...the federal or provincial government?                        | 3 |
| ...a tobacco or e-cigarette company?                            | 4 |
| ...a smoking cessation company?                                 | 5 |
| ...a legal or law firm?   | 6 |
| ...a cannabis-related company?                                  | 7 |

**IF YES TO ANY, THANK AND TERMINATE**

#### **D. DEMOGRAPHICS AND INDUSTRY QUESTIONS**

**ASK ADULTS 18+ ONLY:**

15. Could you please tell me what is the last level of education that you have completed? **[READ LIST]**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| Some high school                         | 1 |
| Completed high school                    | 2 |
| Some college/technical school/CEGEP      | 3 |
| Graduated college/technical school/CEGEP | 4 |
| Some university                          | 5 |
| Graduated university                     | 6 |
| Graduate studies                         | 7 |

**RECRUIT A MIX AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE**

16. Do you consider yourself to be a member of a visible ethno-cultural group?

- Yes 1
- No 2 **GO TO Q18**

17. What is your ethnic background? **[DO NOT READ LIST]**

- Black (African, Afro-Caribbean, African-Canadian descent) 1
- East Asian (Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Taiwanese descent) 2
- Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, Métis) 3
- Latin American (Hispanic descent) 4
- Middle Eastern (West Asian or North African descent,  
For example, Afghan, Egyptian, Iranian) 5
- South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Indo-Caribbean descent) 6
- Southeast Asian (Filipino, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Thai descent) 7
- White (European descent) 8
- Prefer not to answer 9

18. Have you ever attended a discussion group or taken part in an interview on any topic that was arranged in advance and for which you received money for participating?

- Yes 1
- No 2 **GO TO Q22**

19. When did you last attend one of these discussion groups or interviews?

- Within the last 6 months 1 **THANK AND TERMINATE**
- Over 6 months ago 2

20. Thinking about the groups or interviews that you have taken part in, what were the main topics discussed?

**RECORD:** \_\_\_\_\_

**THANK AND TERMINATE IF RELATED TO TOBACCO OR VAPING**

21. How many discussion groups or interviews have you attended in the past 5 years?

- Fewer than 5 1
- Five or more 2 **THANK AND TERMINATE**

22. Participants in group discussions are asked to voice their opinions and thoughts, how comfortable are you in voicing your opinions in a group discussion with others your age? Are you... **READ OPTIONS**

Very comfortable	1	<b>MIN 5 PER GROUP</b>
Fairly comfortable	2	
Not very comfortable	3	<b>THANK AND TERMINATE</b>
Very uncomfortable	4	<b>THANK AND TERMINATE</b>

23. Do you have access to a stable internet connection, capable of sustaining a one and a half hour-long online video conference (90 minutes)

Yes	1	
No	2	<b>THANK AND TERMINATE</b>

24. Participants will be asked to provide their answers through an online web conferencing platform using a computer, a tablet or a smartphone in a quiet room. Is there any reason why you could not participate (for example, no access to computer or tablet, internet)? If you need glasses to read or a device for hearing, please remember to wear them.

Yes	1	<b>THANK AND TERMINATE</b>
No	2	

**DISCONTINUE IF RESPONDENT OFFERS ANY REASON SUCH AS DIFFICULTIES PARTICIPATING IN A WEB CONFERENCE, A SIGHT OR HEARING PROBLEM, A WRITTEN OR VERBAL LANGUAGE PROBLEM, A CONCERN WITH NOT BEING ABLE TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY.**

25. The discussion group will be video-recorded. These recordings are used to help with analyzing the findings and writing the report. The results from the discussions will be grouped together in the research report, which means that individuals will not be identified in anyway. Your name will not appear in the research report. Is this acceptable?

Yes	1	
No	2	<b>THANK AND TERMINATE</b>

26. There will be some people from Health Canada and others involved in this project observing the session. They will not take part in the discussion and they will not know your name. Is this acceptable?

Yes	1	
No	2	<b>THANK AND TERMINATE</b>

## E. INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

### PARTICIPANTS 16+:

Thank you. We would like to invite you to attend one of the discussion groups, which will be led by a researcher from the national public opinion research firm, Quorus Consulting Group. The group will take place on **[DAY OF WEEK]**, **[DATE]**, at **[TIME]** and it will last 1.5 hours. Following your participation, you will receive \$100 to thank you for your time.

27. Are you interested and available to attend?

Yes     1  
No      2     **THANK AND TERMINATE**

To conduct the session, we will be using a screen-sharing application called **Zoom**. **We will need to send you the instructions to connect by email.** The use of a computer, a tablet or a smartphone in a quiet room is required. You cannot be on the road, walking around, in transit, etc. while participating. You should be in a quiet area of your home to participate.

We recommend that you click on the link we will send you a few days prior to your session to make sure you can access the online meeting. You should repeat these steps at least 10 to 15 minutes before your session.

As we are only inviting a small number of people to attend, your participation is very important to us. If for some reason you are unable to attend, please call us, so we can get someone to fill your spot. You cannot send someone as your replacement. You can reach us at **[INSERT NUMBER]** at our office. Please ask for **[INSERT NAME]**.

So that we can contact you to remind you about the focus group or in case there are any changes, can you please confirm your name and contact information for me? **[READ INFO AND CHANGE AS NECESSARY.]**

### **PARTICIPANT**

First name \_\_\_\_\_

Last Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Day time phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Night time phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you!

[If the respondent refuses to give his/her first or last name or phone number please assure them that this information will be kept strictly confidential. It is used strictly to contact them to confirm their attendance and to inform them of any changes to the focus group. If they still refuse **THANK AND TERMINATE.**]

### **15-16 YEAR OLDS:**

In the next few days, we will be sending your parent or legal guardian a letter by email. The letter will have instructions on what you need to do for the discussion group, as well as a consent form that your parent or guardian must sign and return to us in advance of the group. Now I need to talk to your parent/guardian again. Would you please put them back on the phone?

Thank you for allowing me to speak with **[INSERT NAME OF CHILD]**. They would like to participate in the study. Here are a few other details about the group discussion:

- The discussion will take place on **[DAY OF WEEK]**, **[DATE]**, at **[TIME]** and it will last 1.5 hours.
- To conduct the session, we will be using a screen-sharing application called **Zoom**. **We will need to send you the instructions to connect by email.** The use of a computer, a tablet or a smartphone in a quiet room is required. **[INSERT NAME OF CHILD]** cannot be on the road, walking around, in transit, etc. while participating. They should be in a quiet area of your home to participate.
- We recommend that **[INSERT NAME OF CHILD]** clicks on the link we will send them a few days prior to their session to make sure they can access the online meeting. They should repeat these steps at least 10 to 15 minutes before their session.
- Following their participation, **[INSERT NAME OF CHILD]** will be sent \$100.
- As we are only inviting a small number of people to attend, your child's participation is very important to us. If for some reason they are unable to attend, please call us, so we can get someone to fill their spot. They cannot send someone as their replacement. You can reach us at **[INSERT NUMBER]** at our office. Please ask for **[INSERT NAME]**.

In the next few days, we would like to send you a letter by email. The letter will have instructions on what your child needs to do for the discussion group, as well as a consent form that you must sign and return to us in advance of the group. To send the letter, may we please have your contact information?

**PARENT/GUARDIAN**

First name:

Last Name:

Daytime phone number:

Evening phone number:

Email:

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One last thing. Someone from our company will call the day before to remind you about your child's participation in the session.

Thank you!

[If the parent/guardian refuses to give his/her first or last name or phone number please assure them that this information will be kept strictly confidential. It is used strictly to contact them to send the consent forms, confirm their attendance and to inform them of any changes to the focus group. If they still refuse **THANK AND TERMINATE.**]

## Moderation Guide

### Moderation Guide Exploring Youth and Young Adults' Use of Vaping Products

**Script is for all sessions unless otherwise indicated.**

#### Introduction to Procedures (9 minutes)

Thank you all for joining this online focus group!

- Introduce moderator/firm and welcome participants to the focus group.
  - Thanks for attending.
  - My name is [INSERT MODERATOR NAME] and I work with Quorus Consulting, and we are conducting research on behalf of the Government of Canada.
  - We will be seeking your opinion on various aspects of vaping.
  - The discussion will last approximately 90 minutes.
  - If you have a cell phone or other electronic device, please turn it off.
- Describe focus group.
  - A discussion group is a “round table” discussion, meaning we will discuss something and everyone has an equal chance to express an opinion. We will also be asking you to answer survey questions from time to time to help guide the discussion.
  - My job is to facilitate the discussion, keeping us on topic and on time.
  - Your job is to offer your opinions and your experiences related to vaping.
  - There are no right or wrong answers. This is not a knowledge test.
  - Everyone’s opinion is important and should be respected.
  - We want you to speak up even if you feel your opinion might be different from others. Your opinion may reflect that of other Canadians.
  - To participate in this session, please make sure your webcam and your microphone are on and that you can hear me clearly. If you are not speaking, I would encourage you to mute your line to keep background noise to a minimum...just remember to remove yourself from mute when you want to speak!
  - **[AS NEEDED]** I will be sharing my screen to show you some things.
  - We might make use of the chat function. [MODERATOR EXPLAINS HOW TO ACCESS THE ZOOM CHAT FEATURE DEPENDING ON THE DEVICE THE PARTICIPANT IS USING]. Let’s do a quick test right now - please open the chat window and send me a short message (for example, Hello everyone).
- Explanations.



- Please note that your participation is voluntary and that anything you say during this group will be held in the strictest confidence. We do not attribute comments to specific people. Our report summarizes the findings from the groups but does not mention anyone by name.
  - The report can be accessed through the Library of Parliament or Library and Archives Canada website.
  - Your responses will in no way affect your dealings with the Government of Canada.
  - The session is being audio-video recorded for report writing purposes / verify feedback. The recordings remain in our possession and will not be released to anyone, even to the Government of Canada, without your written consent.
  - Some of my colleagues from Quorus and Health Canada involved in this project are watching this session and this is only so they can hear the comments first-hand.
- Please note that I am not an employee of the Government of Canada and may not be able to answer questions about what we will be discussing. If questions do come up over the course of the group, we will try to get answers for you before we wrap up the session.
- Any questions?

**INTRODUCTIONS:** Let's go around – please tell us your name and a little bit about yourself, such as what grade you are in, and if you participate in any social group, school club, or extracurricular activity, etc.

### Product Preferences (20 minutes)

Let's start our discussion by exploring the vaping products you currently use.

I want to begin with the vape itself. **SHOW OF HANDS:** How many of you own your own device?

If you happen to have one with you feel free to show it on the screen for us to see.

- What device is it?
- Why is this the one you've decided to use? Are there specific features that made you pick this device over others?
- What else had an impact on your decision to choose this device in particular?
- How different is this device from the one you used when you first started vaping?
- Where did you obtain that device?
- Do you use multiple devices, and if so, for what reason(s)?
- What are your views on disposable vaping products?

Now let's specifically discuss the products you vape.

- What liquids do you use?
- How long does a bottle or pod typically last you?

- Are you aware of the nicotine levels in the vaping products you use? **MODERATOR QUICKLY OBTAINS CONCENTRATION LEVELS**
- Where does nicotine fit in your overall vaping experience? ...how important is it to you?
- How different are the products you vape compared to when you first started vaping?

Thinking back to the last time you tried a new vape product – what led you to trying that new product?

- Did you see something (like an ad), talk to someone (like a friend, vape shop staff, etc.), read about it (media, social media, etc.)?
- Where do you typically see ads for vape products?

Over the past few years, have you ever had difficulty getting the vape device or the liquids you prefer?

- What challenges did you encounter?
- What do you do when you have trouble accessing your favourite vape products?
- In general, has it generally gotten easier or harder to get vape products? Help me understand this a bit.

**IF GETS VAPING PRODUCTS FROM SOMEONE ELSE:**

- How do you get your vaping products if you don't buy them yourself?

## Current Vaping Patterns (10 minutes)

Can one of you describe for me what a typical day looks like for you and where vaping fits into that day?

- How soon do you vape when you wake up in the morning? ...and when is the last puff taken?
- How many times in a typical day will you vape?
  - When in the day does this tend to typically happen?
- Where do you typically vape? ...and is that location chosen for any particular reason?
- With whom do you typically vape, if anyone?
- What are you doing while you are vaping?
- When you vape...
  - How long is a typical vaping session?
  - How many puffs do you take?

I am curious to understand how any of this has changed over time. When you take a step back and you think about all these aspects of your vaping routine, how have any of these changed compared to when you first started vaping?

## Reasons for Vaping (10 minutes)

**USE THE CHAT:** If I asked you to rate how important vaping is for you personally these days, using a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means “vaping is not at all important to you these days”, and 10 means it is “extremely important”, what rating would you give?

- Help me understand this rating.
- What words would you use to describe your relationship with vaping?

People vape for different reasons – what are yours? ...what do you get out of it exactly?

## Impact of restrictions on flavours (10 minutes)

### EXPLORE IN ONTARIO, NOVA SCOTIA, PEI, NEW BRUNSWICK, BC AND SASKATCHEWAN GROUPS ONLY

Do any of you know of any restrictions in your province on flavours of vaping products and where they can be sold? **IF YES:** What do you know?

Since 2020, some provinces brought in bans or limits on the sale of flavoured vaping products. **[MODERATOR TO ONLY SPEAK TO REGIONS REPRESENTED IN EACH GROUP]**

**ONTARIO GROUPS:** In Ontario since July 2020, the sale of vaping flavours has been limited to specialty stores. Only tobacco and mint/menthol flavours can be sold in non-specialty stores, such as gas stations and convenience stores.

**BC GROUPS:** In BC since July 2020, the sale of vaping flavours has been limited to specialty stores. Only tobacco flavour can be sold in non-specialty stores, such as gas stations and convenience stores

**NOVA SCOTIA GROUPS:** In Nova Scotia since April 2020, all flavours have been banned with the exception of tobacco flavour.

**PEI GROUPS:** In Prince Edward Island since March 2021, all flavours have been banned with the exception of tobacco flavour and it is only available from specialty shops.

**NEW BRUNSWICK GROUPS:** In New Brunswick since September 2021, all flavours have been banned with the exception of tobacco flavour.

**SASKATCHEWAN GROUPS:** In Saskatchewan since September 2021, the sale of vaping flavours has been limited to specialty stores. Only tobacco and mint/menthol flavours can be sold in non-specialty stores, such as gas stations and convenience stores.

Did you notice these bans, or limits on availability of flavoured vaping products when they came into effect in your province?

Did those bans, or limits on flavoured vaping products have any impact on your vaping behaviour? How so?

- How much do flavours matter to you?
- What is your favourite flavour?
- Are the flavours really that different?
- Among the various choices in the market, how do you decide what to buy? What are the most important considerations for you? **AS NEEDED:** Is it the brand? ...cost? ...what's available at the time? ...promotions? ...novelty? ...taste?

**PROBE AS NEEDED:**

- Did they make any of you quit or decrease your vaping?
- Did they make any of you simply switch to the available flavour(s)?
- Did any of you find other ways to get flavours you want? (for example, buy in another province, make your own, buy online, going to a specialty store, other ways)?
- Did the restrictions make you smoke more instead?
- What about other people you know who vape? Do you think the restrictions on flavours had any impact on their vaping behaviour? How so?
- When you consider how your vaping has evolved over the past few years, where do these new restrictions rank in terms of impact? What has had a more important impact on how your vaping has changed over the past few years?
- If a complete flavour ban were to take effect in the next 6 months, what would you do? **PROBE AS NEEDED:** ...just vape what is available, switch to another substance, quit, find other sources, start making their own, etc.?

**[FYI: For anyone from the NWT:** In the Northwest Territories since March 2022, all flavours have been banned with the exception of tobacco flavour.]

**Show of hands** – for how many here does the fact that there are flavours really matter to you in your decision to vape? ...how much do they matter?

- What is your favourite flavour?
- Are the flavours really that different?
- Among the various choices in the market, how do you decide what to buy? What are the most important considerations for you? **AS NEEDED:** Is it the brand? ...cost? ...what's available at the time? ...promotions? ...novelty? ...taste?
- If a complete flavour ban were to take effect in the next 6 months, what would you do? **PROBE AS NEEDED:** ...just vape what is available, switch to another substance, quit, find other sources, start making their own, etc.?
- Do you think this would be an easy transition for you?
- What about other people you know who vape? Do you think this sort of restriction on flavours would have any impact on their vaping behaviour? How so?

### Multiuse (20 minutes)

Let's move on to other substances you may have consumed over the years such as smoking tobacco (for example, cigarettes), using cannabis, drinking alcohol, and using other recreational drugs.

- First of all, can a few of you walk me through your general timeline when it comes to using these various substances?
  - When did you start using some and stop using others? ...if you can include your age along the way, that would be really helpful! I am just trying to get a sense of when vaping started for you in relation to your use of the various other substances.
  - At any point in time, did you switch from one substance to another? What was the switch and what were the reasons behind that switch?
  - At any point in time, did you just stop using a certain substance? Which one(s) and what were the reasons behind that?

Let's now focus on the present time – what do you tend to consume at the same time and what do you consume at very different times? What's the reasoning there?

Help me understand this pattern a bit more:

- What does a typical month look like across the various substances in terms of how often it happens, where you are, and with whom you are?

- For those of you who vape cannabis, how many of you use the same device for general vaping? I am just wondering how many of you chose your device specifically because you can use both regular liquids and cannabis ones.
  - What does each represent to you?
  - How does your selection of product vary by substance?

Given the various substances you are using from time to time...

- Have you ever tried to reduce your use of any or tried to stop outright?
  - What were your reasons at the time?
- Do you envision a time when you think you will reduce your use of any or even stop using any in particular?
  - If so, which one(s)?
  - What would be the reasons behind that shift?
  - Do you think it would be easy or difficult to reduce / stop your use? Why?
- What do people close to you encourage you to quit, if anything?
- Do you envision a time when you think your use of any substance in particular will trend upwards?
  - If so, which one(s)?
  - What would be the reasons behind that change?

### Perceptions Around the Health Impacts of Vaping (10 minutes)

When we take a step back and we look at where vaping stands in society these days – how “acceptable” do you feel it is and has this been changing in recent years?

- In what ways have attitudes changed when it comes to vaping?
- In what ways have attitudes changed, if at all, when it comes to...
  - ...where people vape?
  - ...what people vape?
  - ...what age groups vape?

Have you had any conversations with anyone about the risks related to vaping? ...walk me through this.

- Among all the information you may have seen, read or heard about vaping, has anything stuck with you at all? Was there anything you heard that made you think a bit about the potential risks associated with vaping?
  - What was the message? Who said it or where did you see it?
  - Why did that matter to you?
- What do you know about the health impacts of vaping? Does vaping have any health impacts?
  - Have you personally experienced any of these impacts?
  - If you wanted to get information you could trust about the health effects of vaping, where would you go or who would you ask?

### Wrap-up (1 minute)

Thanks again! The team that invited you to participate in this session will contact you regarding the manner in which you can receive the incentive we promised you.

**Thank you – have a nice evening!**