Do Australians use the prescription pathway when using nicotine vaping products to quit smoking?

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Abstract
Background: In Australia, nicotine vaping products (NVPs) are only legally available to those with a prescription from a doctor. We investigated the proportion of people using NVPs to quit smoking who had a prescription, and whether this increased following regulatory changes in 2021 that strengthened the prescription requirement.

Methods: Australian data from the 2018, 2020 and 2022 International Tobacco Control (ITC) Project Survey were analysed using GEE models with Poisson regressions to analyze differences between years. Data from participants who reported making a quit attempt in the previous two years and reported use of NVPs on their last quit attempt were included (480 observations across 418 individuals). Participants reported whether they had a prescription for NVPs on their last quit attempt. In 2022, they were also asked whether they sourced their prescription from their usual medical practice.

Results: Among those using NVPs for a quit attempt, use with a prescription increased significantly from 2020 to 2022 (IRR=0.35 (0.17-0.73), p=0.005) but was still low at 16.5% (95% CI 11.4-23.1). In 2022, among the small number who reported getting a prescription for NVPs, 27% reported getting it from their regular practice; the remainder from a specialist online doctor service.

Conclusion: There was a modest increase in obtaining a prescription among those who used NVPs for their last quit attempt after regulations were strengthened, however most NVP use for quitting was without a prescription.

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