

# Longitudinal Vaper Panel Survey to Measure Attitudes and Behaviours regarding Vaping Products

## Executive Summary

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## Executive summary

### Background and objectives

The Government of Canada has introduced new legislation to regulate the manufacture, sale, labelling and promotion of vaping products in Canada. The goal is to protect youth and non-users of tobacco products from nicotine addiction and inducements to tobacco use, while allowing adults to legally access vaping products as a less harmful alternative to tobacco.

Vaping products have been in the North American market for approximately a decade. With only a few studies available, data are limited on the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of Canadians as they relate to vaping products. Health Canada is interested in better understanding how Canadians are using vaping products and exploring changes over time in attitudes and behaviours of Canadians towards vaping products.

The main objective of this research was to gather information on the attitudes and behaviours of Canadian vaping product users and ever users aged 15 years and older with respect to vaping products. The specific objectives are to:

- Measure Canadian vaping product users' and ever users' level of awareness and knowledge of vaping products;
- Gather information on Canadian vaping product users' and ever users' behaviours with respect to vaping products;
- Understand any changes in the attitudes and behaviours of users and ever users over time; and,
- Test a longitudinal approach in terms of feasibility and impact (i.e., proof of concept).

### Methodology

To address the research objectives, an online survey was conducted with Canadians aged 15 and over who have ever tried an e-cigarette ("ever vapers"), at two separate points in time:

- Wave 1: an initial measurement for benchmarking purposes, conducted with 1,312 ever vapers from December 15-29, 2017
- Wave 2: conducted with fresh sample (950 respondents who are unique from Wave 1 participants) and with return-to-sample (779 respondents who previously completed the Wave 1 study), from February 1-14, 2018

This approach allows for a cross-sectional analysis (comparing the fresh samples of respondents at Wave 1 and Wave 2) and a longitudinal analysis (following the same sample of respondents who completed both the Wave 1 and Wave 2 surveys). It should be noted that the two waves straddled the new year, which is traditionally a time when people make and attempt health-related resolutions like quitting smoking. There were no specific interventions (e.g., GC announcements) during the data collection period.

Survey respondents were drawn from among panels of individuals who have agreed to participate in online surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the demographic composition of ever vapers in Canada. Because the sample is based on those who initially self-selected for participation in the panel, no estimates of

sampling error can be calculated and the results cannot be described as statistically projectable to the target population.

## Cost of research

The cost of this research was \$149,831.22 (HST included).

## Key findings

The research revealed very few statistically significant changes in vapers' behaviours and attitudes between Waves 1 and 2. This is true for both the cross-sectional ("fresh") sample and for the longitudinal return-to-sample (RTS) group. While we might have expected a larger "New Years' Resolution" effect, it may be that insufficient time passed between late December and early February for measurable behavioural or attitudinal shifts to take place.

Ultimately, the consistency and stability of the results for the cross-sectional and longitudinal samples indicate that either approach would be viable in the future. The higher-than-anticipated response rate for the RTS (a response rate of 25-30% was anticipated but ended up being 59%) suggests that respondents are willing to respond to two surveys at different points in time if they are interested in the topic and the research is properly designed. This includes informing panellists up front that their participation is required in both waves and providing incentives commensurate with their efforts. For these reasons, a longitudinal methodology will typically be costlier than a cross-sectional one, and thus is recommended primarily for when Health Canada wants to understand if an intervention (e.g., a new policy or program) has led to individual-level behaviour change. Where the focus is on understanding how the broader target audience is influenced by the intervention, a cross-sectional (pre-post) survey remains a satisfactory approach.

Aside from methodological implications, a key finding of the research is that there are important differences in vaping behaviours, experiences and preferences by age. The three principal groups compared in this research are **youth vapers** (15-19 years old), **young adult vapers** (20-24 years old) and **adult vapers** (25+ years old), with the largest differences evident between youth vapers (under 20) and the other two age groups.

The following are the key findings of the research:

### E-cigarette use and attitudes

- E-cigarettes with nicotine have been more widely tried/used than varieties without nicotine (roughly three-quarters of vapers have used the former versus six in ten for the latter). Moreover, the frequency of e-cigarette use is higher among users of nicotine e-cigarettes (roughly two in ten are daily users of nicotine e-cigarettes, about double the proportion who use a non-nicotine variety). Overall, regardless of the type of e-cigarette, about one in five are daily vapers, and another third vape occasionally.
- Vapers typically learned about e-cigarettes from someone in their life (a friend, family member or co-worker), and rarely from online sources (less than 10%). The age at which vapers first tried an e-cigarette varies, but a majority (60%) started within the past five years.
- E-cigarette users are attracted primarily by the flavours and/or smell, but especially for adult vapers, by the perception that e-cigarettes can help them reduce or quit regular cigarette use. Perhaps because of

their greater use of e-cigarettes as a substitute for regular cigarettes, adult vapers prefer smoking-related flavours (four in ten favour tobacco or menthol), while youth and young adult vapers prefer fruit and candy flavours (around half favour fruit, bubble gum or confectionary flavours).

- The most common source of devices and e-liquids is a physical store, typically a vape shop but also convenience stores. Youth vapers (under 20) rely more often on others to buy or give them devices and e-liquid than do older vapers.
- Many vapers have made efforts to cut back on vaping. Half of daily or occasional vapers have tried to reduce their use of e-cigarettes, and slightly fewer (around four in ten) have tried to stop outright. Looking to the future, a majority (57%) say they think they will stop using e-cigarettes at some point, although fewer than one in five say they will do so in the next 30 days.
- Generally speaking, vapers believe that e-cigarettes are less harmful than regular cigarettes and that they can help people quit smoking.
- One-quarter of vapers have received or accessed vaping promotional material in the past month through social media; the best recalled source is Facebook. While the majority (six in ten) say they needed to prove their age to access this material, this is far *less* common for youth vapers (only 49% said they needed to).

#### Cigarette use

- Most vapers (83%) smoke regular cigarettes or have at some point. The large majority (eight in ten) of these dual vapers and smokers tried cigarettes first, although this is less the case among youth (69%).
- Over half of people who both smoke and use e-cigarettes say they are vaping to try to quit/reduce cigarette use, and this is particularly true among adults (57%, vs. 45% of young adults and 39% of youth). Despite this, only a minority (one in three) say they are smoking fewer cigarettes since they started vaping.
- The vast majority of dual vapers and current smokers say they have tried to quit smoking in the past (eight in ten), and that they plan to quit regular cigarettes at some point (almost nine in ten). However, only around one-quarter say they will do so in the next month, suggesting a firmer commitment to the goal.
- Six in ten smokers who made previous quit attempts used a cessation aid, most commonly a nicotine patch, although e-cigarettes are almost as prevalent. Smokers who are planning to quit most commonly say they'll use e-cigarettes (both with and without nicotine).

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