

Youth-centred insights into vaping cessation

October 2025



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About Healthwatch

Healthwatch is the independent voice of the patient. We listen to peoples' experiences of health and social care services to feedback how to improve them.

Healthwatch uses your feedback to better understand the challenges facing the NHS and other care providers and we make sure your experiences improve health and care for everyone – locally and nationally. We can also help you to get the information and advice you need to make the right decisions for you and to get the support you deserve.

Why this project?

Purpose and objectives

- More young people in England are vaping. ASH says 7.2% of 11–18-year-olds vape now, and 18% have tried it¹.
- In Swindon, the 2023/24 “How Are You?” survey found 12% of Year 10 students vape at least weekly².
- Vaping can harm brain development and lead to addiction. It may also increase the risk of anxiety, mood problems, and trouble sleeping.
- Teenagers who vape are three to five times more likely to start smoking cigarettes when compared to non-vapers³.
- Those who vape are more likely to have breathing issues, and the risk increases with more vaping⁴.
- In 2024, Healthwatch Swindon and B&NES surveyed 125 young people (88.8% aged 15–19). 33% had tried vaping; 26.4% used vapes regularly—above national and local averages.
- Reasons included curiosity, stress, peer pressure, and easy access.
- The Healthwatch report says we need a joined-up approach. This includes strong rules, better education, and support for young people—like quit-lines, nicotine help, and mental health services
- Source: [E-Cigarettes use in Adolescents across Bath and North East Somerset and Swindon](#)
- We will focus on:
 - What are young people’s views and experiences about vaping.
 - What makes it harder or easier for young people to vape, or to try and stop.
 - What support is missing to help them stop.
 - How can we improve services and support using young people’s ideas.

¹ <https://ash.org.uk/resources/view/use-of-e-cigarettes-among-young-people-in-great-britain>

² <https://wayuk.org/health-needs-report-2024/>

³ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2667009724000587>

⁴ <https://evidence.nihr.ac.uk/alert/vaping-is-linked-with-breathing-issues-in-young-people/>

Support for this project:

We want to thank the WAY Changemakers—a brilliant group of young people aged 12 to 25. Your ideas, energy, and honesty helped shape this project. You've shown how support for quitting vaping can be better for young people.

A big thank you to Sam Lloyd, CEO of WAY, for helping organise this project and welcoming us.

Thanks also to Mike McEwan from Swindon Borough Council's Public Health team. Your leadership and support made this work possible.



Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Mental health support and messaging

Issue:

Many young people turn to vaping to cope with stress, anxiety, and social pressures. Neurodivergent individuals may also use it to navigate social situations. However, many may not realise the long-term mental health risks associated with nicotine use.

Recommendation:

Mental health support services such as CAMHS, MIND, and BeU should actively share vaping cessation resources with young people. Messaging should explain how nicotine may contribute to worsening anxiety and mood over time, while promoting healthier, sustainable coping strategies.

Next Steps:

Mental Health services should:

Co-create short videos or animations with young people about vaping and mental health for platforms like TikTok and Instagram.

Partner with WAY Changemakers and co-design leaflets or digital content with young creatives at WAY Studios (hello@wayuk.org) to ensure resources are made by young people, for young people.

Collaborate with local youth mental health services (e.g., CAMHS, MIND) to offer drop-in sessions or workshops that explore the mental health impacts of nicotine.

Ensure resources are neurodivergent-friendly and include peer-led support options.

Recommendation 2: Easy, youth-friendly access to support

Issue:

Young people want help that is free, private, and easy to access—but they often avoid direct engagement with school-based services due to stigma or fear of judgment. However, schools remain a key setting for reaching young people consistently and effectively.

Recommendation:

ASH, schools, and local authorities should collaborate to create discreet, youth-friendly access points for vaping support. Schools should be equipped with evidence-based resources and signposting to help young people make informed choices and access support without stigma.

Next Steps:

Public Health Swindon should work with national partners to pilot a “Nicotine-Free Toolkit” in schools, youth centres, GP surgeries, and community venues using resources similar to, or with those developed by Smokefree Sheffield⁵, which include:

- Posters for display in school toilets, classrooms, and noticeboards
- A short, animated film for use in PSHE lessons, assemblies, and form times
- A classroom presentation with teacher notes
- A teacher’s toolkit with supporting information
- An electronic leaflet for parents and carers

These resources have been successfully implemented in over 77 local authorities and are being updated in line with the Tobacco and Vapes Bill and Defra Bill.

Workshops for headteachers and safeguarding leads should be held to support implementation, with involvement from Public Health leadership.

Ensure school nurses and staff are trained to discreetly signpost young people to support and provide non-judgmental advice.

⁵ <https://www.ncsct.co.uk/library/view/pdf/Service-case-study-SmokeFree-Sheffield.pdf>

Recommendation 3: Promote Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) for young people

Issue:

Many young people attempt to quit vaping without support, often trying to go “cold turkey.” They are frequently unaware of safer, more effective options like NRT. In many schools, the focus remains on punishment rather than support.

Recommendation:

Public Health Swindon, in partnership with youth-centred organisations, schools, mental health services, and pharmacists, should raise awareness of NRT and behavioural alternatives—such as fidget tools—to help young people manage cravings and adopt healthier coping mechanisms. Resources should be co-developed with young people to ensure they are relevant and accessible.

Next Steps:

Partners should:

Collaborate with WAY and other youth-led groups to co-design engaging, youth-friendly materials (e.g. leaflets, animations, social media content) that explain NRT and behavioural strategies like using fidget spinners or breathing tools.

Distribute these materials through youth organisations, schools, and trusted community venues.

Promote the resources via school assemblies, PSHE lessons, and youth-led campaigns to normalise support-seeking and reduce stigma.

Train school staff, youth workers, and peer mentors to offer brief, non-judgmental advice and signposting to NRT and behavioural support.

Encourage schools to adopt a supportive approach—using vaping as a conversation starter around mental health and stress management, and offering NRT resources to young people caught vaping.

Methodology

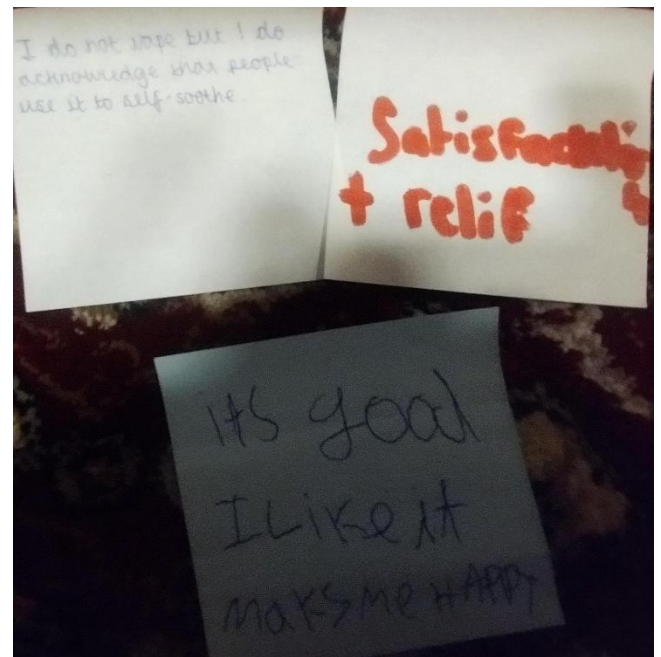
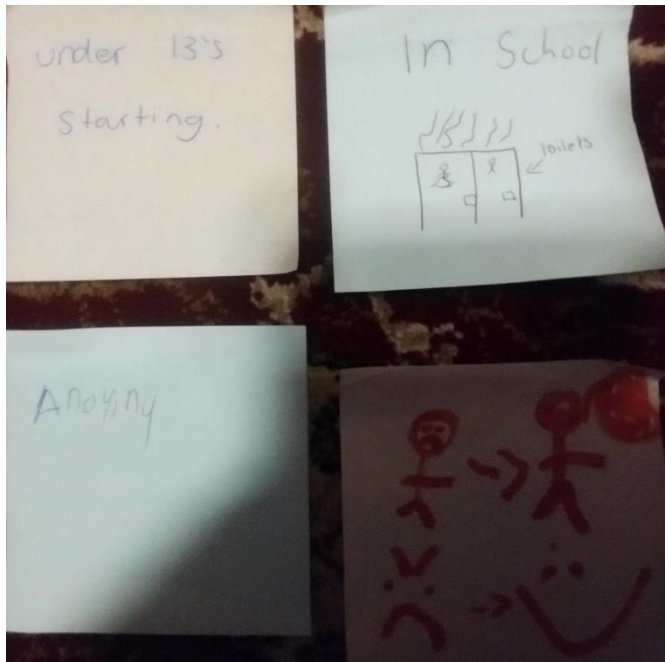
In June 2025, we visited WAY and spoke with 12 Changemakers. The session was planned by Healthwatch and the public health team. It was designed to be fun, engaging, and to hear real views from young people.

Session Part	Time	Activity	Details
1. Welcome & Icebreaker	10 mins	Introduction & warm-up	Casual welcome, introductions, icebreaker just for the group.
2. Quickfire Brainstorm	15 mins	Group discussion on vaping	Use sticky notes to write the first thing that comes to mind when we say “vaping”: Open discussion for people to share and elaborate on their thoughts.
3. Challenge Brief	5 mins	Present creative task	Teams must pitch an idea to reduce youth vaping in Swindon (e.g. campaign, app, workshop, or service). Try answer: message, audience, delivery, and impact.
4. Group Design Time	20 mins	Develop and design ideas	Use flipchart paper, markers, or digital tools. Facilitators prompt with questions to deepen thinking and make solutions relatable.
5. Pitch to the health professionals	25 mins	Group presentations	2–3 mins per pitch + 1 min feedback. The health professionals (WAY, Public Health and Healthwatch) ask about real-world application, teen appeal, and needed support.
6. Wrap-Up & Takeaways	5 mins	Reflection	Share key insights or standout moments from the session.

Young people's views on vaping

When we asked, "What do you think of when you hear the word vaping?" young people shared a wide range of views. They didn't just talk about the usual things like flavours, how vapes look, or the health risks. They also spoke about bigger issues, like how vaping affects people's health and how it fits into their social lives. Their answers led to some great conversations. Some young people agreed with each other, while others had different opinions and challenged each other's views in a respectful way.





Responses

Positive views

"Satisfaction + relief"

"Satisfaction + fitting in"

"Alternative to smoking for those who want to quit"

"😊"

"It's good, I like it, makes me happy"

"Makes me happy"

"I do not do it but I acknowledge that people use it to self-soothe"

"Autism masking" (can be seen as a coping mechanism)

"Stress-relieving addictive tool" (mixed, but includes a perceived benefit)

Negative views

"Vaping was when I was most suicidal"

"Social pressure"

"I never thought it was cool"

"Vaping is just the same as smoking"

"There are a lot of used vapes left in public areas"

"In school toilets"

"Everywhere"

"Anxiety"

"Harms lungs"

"Bad"

"An expensive habit £££"

"Vaping is a more constant use over other nicotine products"

"Under 13s starting"

Vaping to cope

Many young people said they use vaping to help them deal with difficult feelings. This includes stress, anxiety, and feeling low. Some also said it helps them in social situations, especially those who are neurodivergent (for example, autistic young people who use vaping to feel more comfortable around others).

This shows that vaping is sometimes used as a way to feel better in the short term. But it's important to remember that nicotine can be harmful to both mental and physical health over time.

"I know It isn't good for me but it helps me relax in anxious situations"

Peer pressure and vaping becoming normal

Young people also talked about how common vaping is. They said it happens in school toilets and in many public places. Some even said children under 13 are vaping.

Because vaping is seen so often, it can start to feel normal. This can lead to peer pressure, where young people feel they have to vape to fit in.

Mixed opinions about vaping

Not everyone sees vaping the same way. Some young people said it's bad, addictive, or harmful. Others said it makes them feel happy or helps them stop smoking cigarettes.

This shows that young people have different views. It also means that health messages about vaping need to be honest and reflect real experiences to be trusted.

Other worries

Young people also raised other worries:

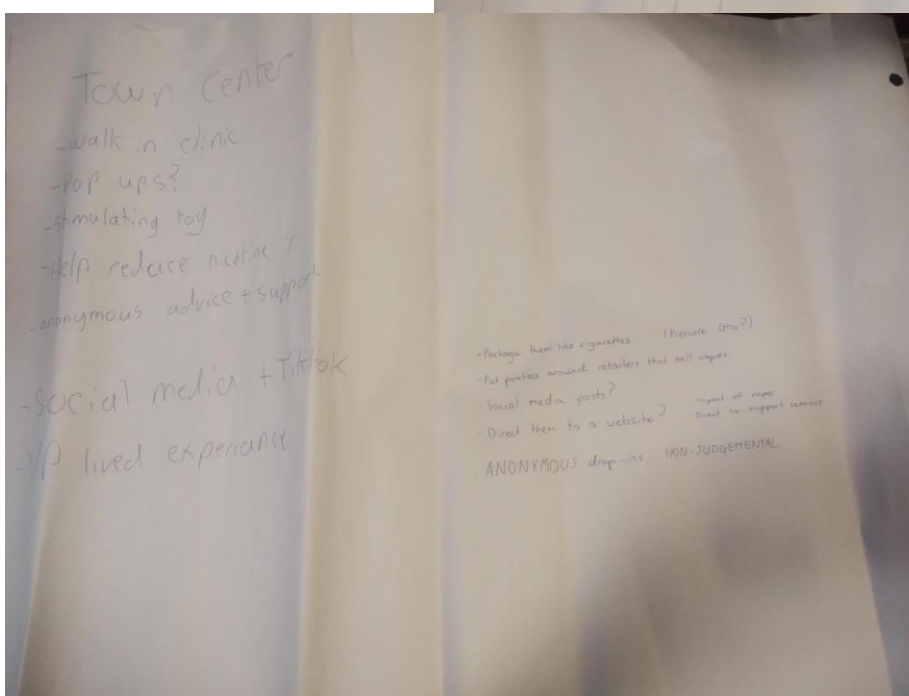
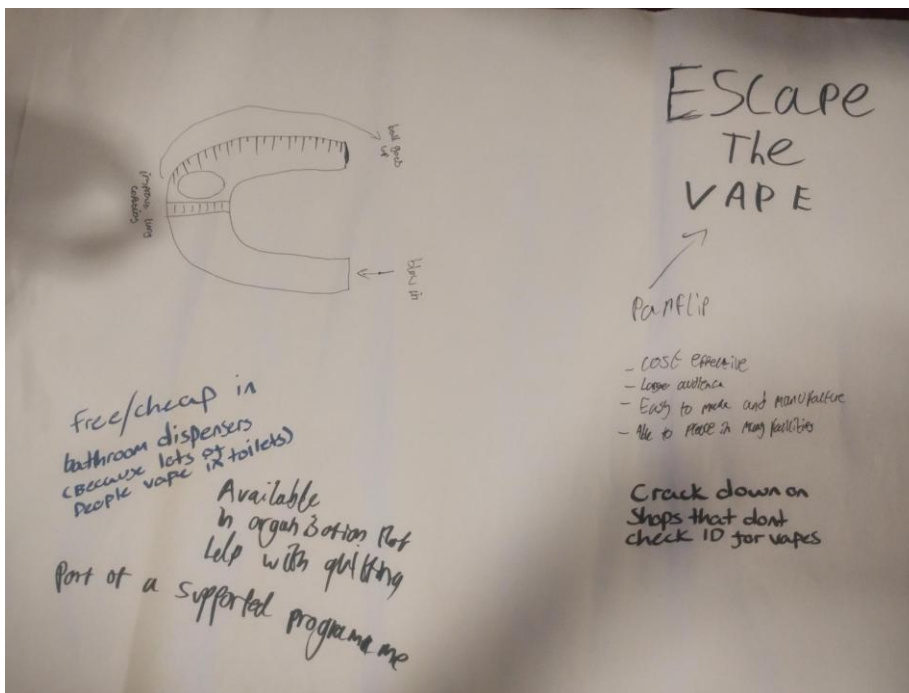
- Vapes being thrown away and littering public spaces
- The high cost of vaping
- How easy it is to buy vapes, even for underage users
- Shops selling vapes illegally
- Vaping happening often in schools

These concerns show that current rules may not be working well enough. Young people are clearly aware of the wider problems linked to vaping.

"I never get ID'd in the sketchy shops and they still sell disposables"

Young people's ideas for vaping support

As part of the workshop, young people worked in small groups to design support tools to help others stop vaping. They took part in a fun "Dragons' Den" style activity and came up with similar ideas, even when working separately. This showed that they shared common views on what support should look like.



Physical tools to replace vaping

All groups suggested creating something physical to replace the feeling of vaping. Ideas included:

- Flavoured devices (without nicotine)
- Fun tools that help improve breathing or lung strength
- They said that vaping often helps people feel calm because of the action of holding and using the device. So, any tool to help people quit should give the same kind of feeling.

“Vaping gives me something to do with my hands while I am walking somewhere”

Easy and private access

Young people said it’s important that support is free, easy to get, private and not embarrassing. They suggested things like vending machines or getting help from trusted adults like school nurses, GPs, or youth workers. They also liked the idea of “Nicotine-Free Clinics” in communities. However, the young people did not like the idea of this support being offered in schools as there is a stigma about seeing the school nurse for vaping.

“you do not want to be seen going to the school nurse”

In-person support centres

They also wanted places where young people can go for help without needing a referral. These centres could offer:

- Personal quit plans
- Group sessions
- Peer support (talking to others their age)

They said these places should feel safe, friendly, and not judgmental.

Clear and catchy messaging

To get young people interested, they suggested:

- Campaigns with fun names like “Escape the Vape”
- Posters with QR codes
- Websites with helpful info
- Social media content on platforms like TikTok

They said messages should feel real and relatable.

Stronger rules and enforcement

Many felt strongly about stopping illegal vape sales. They wanted:

- Tougher rules for shops that sell to underage users
- Bigger fines or penalties
- Some even said they'd be willing to stand outside shops to raise awareness

The young people even supported the idea of changing the packaging of vapes to make them seem less appealing to young people. Supporting the packaging style and messages used on cigarettes.

"Cigarettes don't taste nice and has the ugly packaging, why don't they do that with vapes"

What this tells us

Young people want a mix of support to help them stop vaping. This includes:

- Tools that feel like vaping but are safe
- Easy and private ways to get help
- Friendly places to talk and get support
- Clear messages that speak their language
- Stronger action against illegal sales



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