

# Research Poster Awards 2023

## Translating community voice into health promotion action to reduce vaping by young people in the Barwon region.

"You have made them available for me but now you're saying it's bad for me."

Quote by a young person brought to the session by an attendee

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### INTRODUCTION

There is significant local, state, and national concern regarding the rising incidence of e-cigarette use ("vaping") among non-smoking youth. While we do not have substantial evidence of the long-term health implications of e-cigarette use in humans, there is significant cause for concern in emerging health data (1). Most e-cigarettes, have been found to contain nicotine (2), a highly addictive chemical that can harm brain development in the teenage years (3). Emerging evidence suggests that individuals who are non-smokers but use e-cigarettes are three times as likely to transition to tobacco compared to non-smokers who never use e-cigarettes, suggesting a potential "gateway" effect (4).

### OBJECTIVES

The aims of this study were twofold: Firstly, to explore young people's and key stakeholder's perceptions of factors driving vaping behaviours; Secondly to use this information to develop feasible, collaborative intervention strategies for implementation by the Barwon Health, Healthy Communities Unit to reduce the use of e-cigarettes by young people (aged 12-25) in the Barwon region.

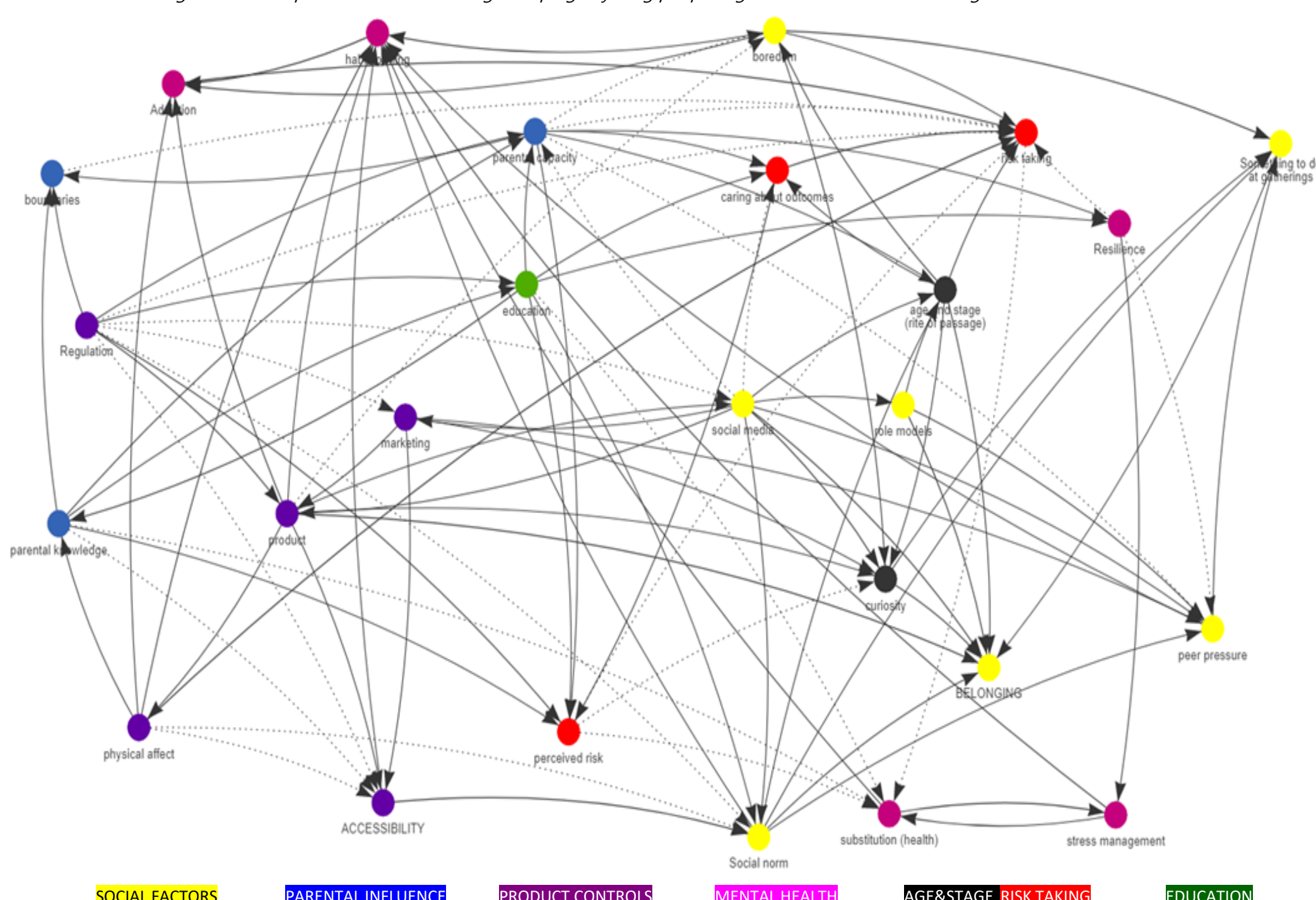
### METHOD

We applied participatory action research that adapted a 'group model build' process to gather qualitative data from key stakeholders of youth settings in the Barwon region including schools, mental health, youth and homeless services.

We utilised the Deakin University STICKE program to generate a causal diagram that summarised a shared understanding of factors contributing to youth vaping.

The social map created (fig. 1) was then used to highlight opportunities to intervene, before stepping through a process of prioritising interventions (fig 2).

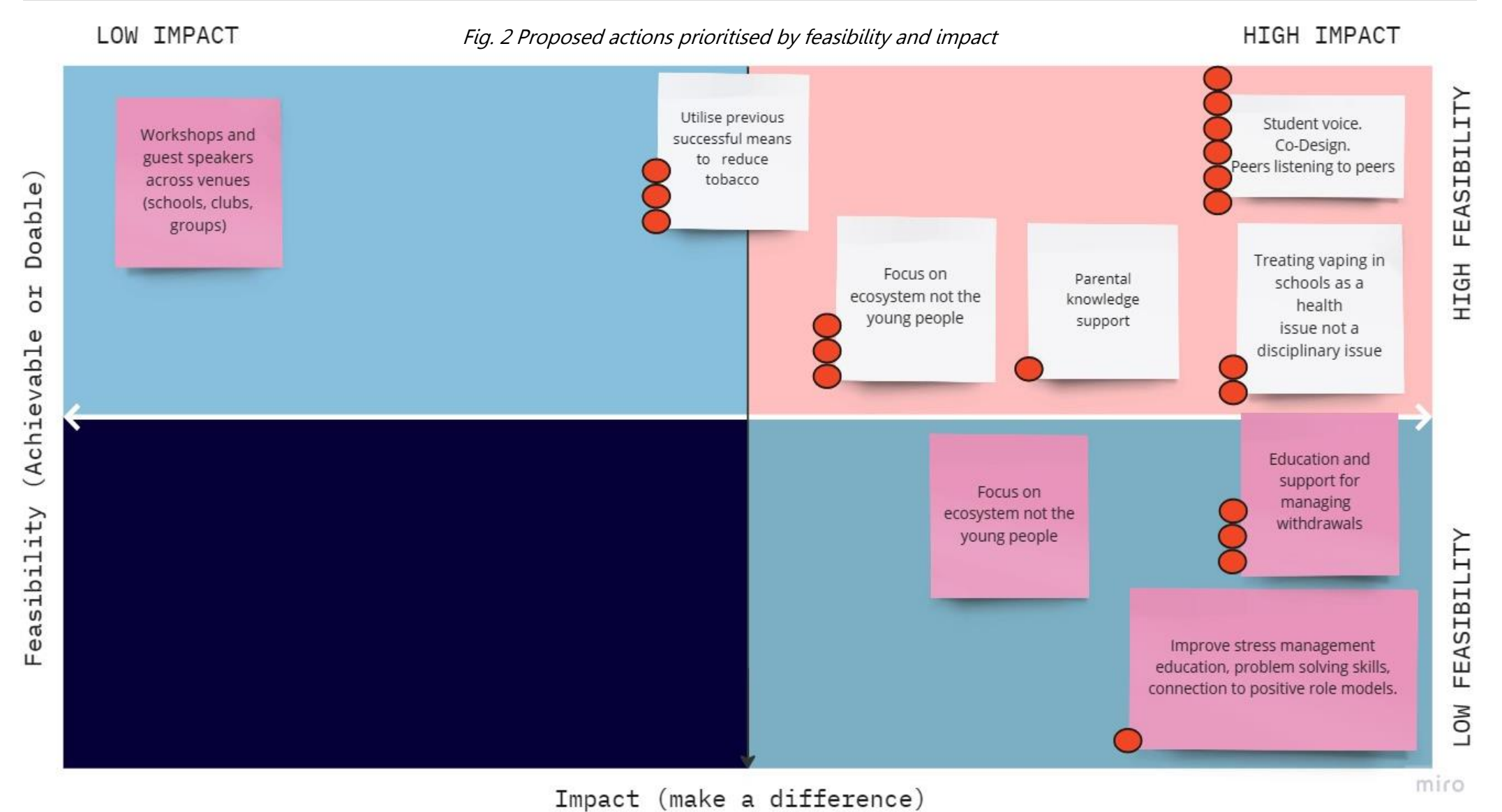
Fig. 1 Causal map of factors contributing to vaping in young people aged 12 – 25 in the Barwon region



### RESULTS

Ten participants attended, representing nine agencies including schools, welfare, youth, and health services. Over 180 young people's responses were presented. Identified factors were grouped into the themes of education, product, mental health, family influence, social factors, and age-and-stage.

Prioritised actions included: reducing accessibility; school, parent and youth education and information provision; co-designed peer-led interventions; and referral pathways. The prioritised action was to co-design development of skill-building resources with young people.



### DISCUSSION

Some identified factors accorded with those found in earlier studies(1;-5). Additional factors included family influences, boredom, substitution for other addictive behaviours or substances, and actively seeking the physical effects of nicotine.

We identified inter-relationships between factors, such as the role of social media on creating new perceptions of social norms that then placed pressure on young people to adjust their behaviours.

Crucially, we identified that the factors influencing vaping behaviours are affected by the age and stage of young people, and that young people lack the skills to recognise and respond to peer and social pressure when they encounter it.

Finally, this study drew out the need for advocacy by health and education sectors as well as community members to lobby for legislative changes to restrict e-cigarette availability and contents.

To address the rising incidence of e-cigarette use by young people, we must work collaboratively across government, education, health and the home to address the driving factors at an appropriate age, and provide young people with practical skills needed to manage those factors in healthy ways.

### CONCLUSION

This study provided insights into how health services can support their communities to reduce vaping by young people. The consultation indicated that resources alone were insufficient, that skill building for young people was a crucial component to reduce youth e-cigarette use, and that the 'age and stage' theme needs further exploration.

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