

Vape starter kits could help smokers quit

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Giving out vape starter kit vouchers through the UK's National Health Service could help even hardened smokers quit, according to a new *Nicotine and Tobacco Research* study from the University of East Anglia.

Researchers worked with GPs and the NHS stop smoking service, which is commissioned locally by Public Health at Norfolk County Council, to set up a pilot vape shop voucher scheme to help patients who had tried and failed to quit smoking in the past.

An evaluation of the scheme, funded by Norfolk County Council, showed it was a big success—with 42% of the entrenched [smokers](#) who were referred to it and redeemed their vape voucher having quit within a month.

Due to the success of the pilot, the scheme has been rolled out across Norfolk and the research team hope it could be rolled out nationally to help more smokers quit.

Lead researcher and addiction expert Prof Caitlin Notley, from UEA's Norwich Medical School, said, "Research shows that vaping is an effective way of quitting smoking, compared to nicotine replacement therapies like patches and gum. E-cigarettes or vapes are now the most popular way of stopping smoking.

"Our research has previously shown that they may be particularly helpful in helping people to not only quit, but to stay quit for good.

"We wanted to see whether GPs giving out vape shop vouchers, alongside support from the stop smoking service, can help smokers quit. We particularly wanted to target vulnerable and disadvantaged smokers who had failed to quit smoking by other means," she added.

Dr. Louise Smith, Norfolk's Director of Public Health, welcomed the collaboration with UEA on this council-led initiative to further develop services to support people to quit smoking.

The team worked with GPs in Great Yarmouth, in a bid to help patients

with comorbidities who had tried and failed to quit smoking previously.

Around 21 percent of people who live in Great Yarmouth smoke tobacco, compared to 14 percent of people in the rest of Norfolk, and 15 percent as a national average.

The pilot scheme saw 668 participants referred to receive a vape shop voucher that could be redeemed for an initial starter kit from a local vape shop.

Of these, 340 went on to redeem their voucher.

As well as picking up their starter kit, the participants were given advice about e-liquid strengths and flavors, and provided with additional support from Smokefree Norfolk.

The research team also interviewed some of the participants about their experience, alongside vape shop staff, GPs and staff at Smokefree Norfolk.

Prof Notley said, "This innovative approach saw the NHS local stop smoking service, vape retailers and researchers working together, recognizing that other forms of smoking cessation support do not work for everyone.

"This scheme enabled 42 percent of entrenched smokers who redeemed a voucher to have successfully quit smoking at four weeks. This is especially important because it helped those who have tried and failed to quit smoking many times to move away from tobacco.

"Overall, the project was well received by smokers as it offered an affordable route into vaping. GPs supported the scheme and appreciated being able to offer an alternative to entrenched smokers," she added.

The team hope that a similar voucher scheme could be rolled out across the UK, to help more people switch from smoking to vaping, and reduce the number of people that still smoke cigarettes.

More information: A pilot e-cigarette voucher scheme in a rural county of the United Kingdom, *Nicotine and Tobacco Research* (2022).

Provided by University of East Anglia

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