

**For Immediate Release
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3 in 4 Specialty Vape Shops Illegally Targeting Youth

Explosive finding demonstrates importance of keeping vapes in trusted, responsible retail environments

Toronto, Ontario (Nov 18, 2019) – According to Health Canada, more than 75 per cent of specialty vape shops are selling and promoting products that violate federal laws, including the sale of flavours designed to appeal to youth. First reported by the Globe and Mail on November 16, the shocking results of Health Canada’s audit of specialty vape shops across Canada call into question the wisdom of restricting vape sales to these largely unregulated specialty vape stores.

While the explosion of specialty vape shops in Canada is a relatively recent phenomena, the convenience store industry has been a trusted, age-verified retailer for decades. Mystery shopping tests conducted by the Ontario government in 2018 for legal tobacco sales show an underage sales prevention success rate of 96%. Lending further support to the credibility of the convenience store retail model for age-restricted products, Government of Canada data shows that almost 90% of youth who vape, or have tried vaping, are getting these products from “social sources,” such as older siblings or friends, online purchases, and grey-market retailers, which includes specialty vape shops that are not subject to the same regulations and enforcement oversight as convenience stores.¹

“Convenience stores have responsibly retailed lottery and other age-restricted products for decades. Vape shops, on the other hand, have no track record of refusing sales to minors,” said Anne Kothawala, President and CEO of the Convenience Industry Council of Canada. “Many of these vape shops started selling nicotine vapes before they were legal in Canada. Upon this foundation of criminality, they are building predatory businesses that sell hundreds of flavours designed to hook youth, like bubble gum and candy cane. At convenience stores, we only sell federally approved vapes with a narrow selection of flavours, all of which meet Health Canada’s strict requirement that they do not appeal to youth,” added Kothawala.

With growing evidence that vaping is a less harmful alternative to smoking and a potentially helpful tool in achieving the public health goal of smoking cessation, the convenience store industry wants to be a partner in helping provide more adult smokers with access to these products. But governments have to decide whether they are actually serious about helping more people quit smoking. In British Columbia, the provincial government recently announced it would undermine its own public health goals by unfairly restricting the vape flavours convenience stores can sell, sending youth to specialty vape shops that purport to be “adult only” but have absolutely no track record of refusing sales to minors.

“If the steps being taken in B.C. were to be emulated across the country, it would be a sad day for public health,” warned Kothawala. “Appropriate flavours are essential in encouraging adult smokers to try vaping. With the vast majority of smokers already purchasing their legal cigarettes at convenience stores, these vape flavours need to be available at convenience stores. It is unreasonable to expect that

¹ According to the federal government’s Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drug Survey, almost 50% of all youth who have tried a vaping product borrowed, shared or bought them from a friend or relative. Conversely, 23% purchased them from a specialty vape shop and only 12% purchased them from a convenience store.

adult smokers will seek out far flung vape shops with restricted hours. On the other hand, we already know from the data that youth will. Furthermore, in some more remote communities, the local convenience store is the only option for adult consumers.”

“Many vape shops are clearly breaking the law, yet the B.C. government wants to give them a helping hand while punishing the neighbourhood stores who obey the law every single day. Convenience stores are frustrated with these discriminatory policies, and we have every right to be,” concluded Kothawala. “We need evidence-based decision making and what we are getting from B.C. is the complete opposite.”

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About the Convenience Industry Council of Canada (CICC)

The CICC is a national, not-for-profit council that unites our members who put the needs of the customer first and provides a place of community. We advocate for the diverse and dynamic convenience channel by representing retail and distributor members to the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government on issues affecting their business. For More information, please visit: <https://convenienceindustry.ca/>

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